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# Functions of Liminality in Literature: A Study of Georges Bataille's "Le Bleu Du Ciel", Julien Green's "L'Autre", and Assia Djebar's "L'Amour, La Fantasia".

Malynda Strother Taylor

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College*

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FUNCTIONS OF LIMINALITY IN LITERATURE:  
A STUDY OF GEORGES BATAILLE'S LE BLEU DU CIEL,  
JULIEN GREEN'S L'AUTRE, AND  
ASSIA DJEBAR'S L'AMOUR, LA FANTASIA

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
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requirements for the degree of  
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in

The Department of French and Italian

by  
Malynda Strother Taylor  
B.A. Ouachita Baptist University, 1963  
M.Ed. Northwestern State University, 1988  
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## ABSTRACT

The term "liminality" originated in the work of two socioanthropologists, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner; it is descriptive of the middle phase in a rite of passage. Whereas the "betwixt and between" transitional pattern is temporary in tribal societies, it often becomes a way of life in the twentieth century. Although their projects differ greatly, Victor Turner's and Jacques Derrida's mutual interest in border spaces brings them both into this discussion. Some of the same phenomena described by the sociological term, liminality, is discussed philosophically as "undecidability" and "aporia."

Liminality functions to link and to investigate three disparate twentieth-century novels written in French: Georges Bataille's Le Bleu du ciel, Julien Green's L'Autre, and Assia Djebar's L'Amour, la fantasia. Transgressivity, by its violation of convention, places one in liminality as is evident in Le Bleu du ciel. Religious experience is undeniably liminal, and in L'Autre the experience of liminality results in Christian conversion. *Communitas* is a spontaneous bonding that occurs among those undergoing liminal experiences together, and in L'Amour, la fantasia, the narrator writes for a community of women telling the stories of human suffering in Algeria's past.

The schema for investigating each text is: the authority of the author since each of these writers is marginal to the commonly-accepted canon of French literature; the narratorial voice as it moves from one male to a male-female combination, to a proliferation of women's voices; and feminine presence which evolves in these novels as women become more prominent.

The notion of liminality is useful not only in the analysis of literary texts, but it can also be seen as descriptive of the transitional state that literature and literary studies have entered during the past thirty years. Deconstruction and feminism are discussed as the catalysts prompting this sense of displacement in literary studies. Derrida uses the term *écriture* to denote writing that disturbs the logocentrism of literary and philosophical thinking. Feminist writers like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray have borrowed this term to signify a style of writing they call *écriture féminine* that explores women's language and literary production.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION: LIMINALITY IN LITERATURE

Liminality, a twentieth-century term that originated in socioanthropology, has more recently become useful in the study of literature. It serves here to link and to investigate three disparate twentieth-century novels written in French: Georges Bataille's Le Bleu du ciel, Julien Green's L'Autre, and Assia Djebar's L'Amour, la fantasia. By examining the functions of liminality as revealed in these three texts, I wish to call attention to liminality as a term that is not only useful in the analysis of literary texts, but is also descriptive of the transitional state of literature and literary studies at the present time.

In this first chapter I will discuss the meaning and history of the term liminality, explore its philosophical roots, review the literature in which liminality has been given a literary application, and present the aspects of liminality that will serve as themes of chapters two through four. Finally, I will pose a question for the wider application of liminality to which I will return in chapter five.

According to sociologist Victor Turner, liminality, a term derived from the Latin word *limen* meaning threshold, is the condition of being "betwixt and between," or in

transition (Dramas 47). The idea of the threshold has been a focus of discussion by various commentators in recent years. Mary Ann Caws discusses the threshold concept applied to literature. She writes:

[T]he present awareness of liminality and its applications is of far reach. This broad threshold includes at once the multiple notions of border, hinge, and articulation-- Jacques Derrida's concept of *brisure* or the joining break neatly resuming those meanings--of beginning and exit, of the place for crossing-over, and of the link between inside and out. (Caws, Eye 15)

Denis Hollier in Against Architecture mentions Janus, god of the threshold, "who presided over beginnings and the one who watched over passages" (62). In The Prophetic Moment Angus Fletcher observes: "Roman religion associated the oracular threshold with the deity, Janus. He is a god of gates" (48). Of specific interest to this study is the attention given to the threshold in Janine Carrel's L'expérience du seuil dans l'oeuvre de Julien Green in which she discusses Green's work as a threshold itinerary - "'itinéraire du seuil'" (85).

Victor Turner in The Anthropology of Performance points out that the English word 'threshold' "is derived from a Germanic base which means 'thrash' or 'thresh,' a place where grain is beaten out from its husk, where what has been hidden is thus manifested" (Anthology 92). By selecting the three novels mentioned above, I hope to

"thrash" out or explicate something of the meaning of the experience of liminality and then to investigate its application to literature and literary studies today.

The texts in this study are introduced in their chronological order, but also in the order in which I view a progression of liminality. I perceive that its evidence increases from one text to the next in three categories: first, with respect to each author's "authority" relative to canonical literature in France; second, in the proliferation of narratorial voices; and third, using women as one model of liminality, there is a progression of the feminine presence in these texts as roles that are traditionally assigned to men are given to women.

In the category of authorship, Bataille, Green, and Djébar occupy a liminal or threshold position in relation to the traditional canon of French literature. They have only recently, and almost simultaneously, become included in various anthologies of literature and syllabi for college courses. In even a casual reading of these texts, the reasons for their marginality become obvious. Bataille is borderline because of his transgressivity evident in Le Bleu du ciel, Green because of his bias for religious themes, apparent in L'Autre, and Djébar because she is an



Algerian woman who writes in French, a threshold position prominent in L'Amour, la fantasia.

Le Bleu du ciel, a text written by a man who is French and who writes in French, represents the source of traditional canonical literature in France. Bataille's choice of material that transgresses established standards of bourgeois tastes is likely the only thing that has suppressed his writing. He lived and wrote on the threshold of life styles since his work as a librarian gave cover to activities that violated all boundaries of the respectable bourgeoisie. Stoekl writes:

Bataille himself was far from being a calm and orderly librarian. In 1926 he wrote a book entitled W.C. (later burned by him, although its first chapter, devoted to his heroine Dirty, has been preserved as the opening section of Blue of Noon), which had a cover decorated with the sketch of an eye peeping out of the neck-hole of a guillotine and which bore the subtitle The Eternal Return. (Visions x)

Bataille's writing is an incongruent mix that combines grammatically exquisite elements of style with content so deliberately transgressive that much of his work was not even published in his lifetime (Suleiman, Subversive 81). With his writing in the thirties and forties, Bataille inconspicuously set ajar a spiritual and intellectual back door which, following the events of 1968 in France, was discovered and thrown wide open giving him belated but

legitimate authority since the measure of his influence is now widely felt in literary and critical studies.

Although the term "liminality" was not in use at the time of Bataille's Collège de Sociologie, that project would qualify as an experience in liminality, as Michèle H. Richman notes in her article "Introduction to the Collège de Sociologie: Post-structuralism Before Its Time?" She explains Turner's concept of the transitional state of liminality as the problematic that links Bataille and his Collège de Sociologie to the work of theorists today:

Victor Turner . . . describes transitional states termed liminality or communitas, when a group transgresses institutional norms and is temporarily stripped of its structural, defining attributes. . . . Turner allows us to first reassess the legacy of the Collège in light of research into socially marginal phenomena that are appreciated as necessary precursors to change.  
(88-89)

According to Richman, Bataille is liminal primarily because he was ahead of his time.

Whereas the writer of Le Bleu du ciel fits easily within the usual context of French authorship, L'Autre is from a rather unlikely source, an American man who lives in Paris and prefers to write in French; his writing also crosses unspecified barriers due to his inclusion of material that is overtly religious and unapologetically

Christian. Green writes as unabashedly about religious experience as Bataille writes about the transgressive.

Green seems to be a kind of Janus, looking constantly in two directions. He was born in Paris in 1900 and grew up on a threshold of cultures, that of the French with whom he was educated and a phantom culture of the American Old South that his parents imported to France and preserved in their home. Moreover, he seems never to have overcome the inner conflicts derived from a strict, puritanical upbringing that puts him at odds with his sexual inclinations (Newbury 13-16). But Green's angst seems to hold little interest for most writers and readers in the late twentieth century. A comment by Roland Barthes in The Pleasure of the Text concerning his own preferences for leisure reading is an example of the marginal position that Green's novels hold in the reading repertoire of most literary critics. He writes: "[F]or hours on end I read Zola, Proust, Verne, . . . and sometimes even Julian Green" (40, emphasis added). Barthes uses the American spelling of Green's first name - another indication of Green's liminal status.

Although in 1971 Green was named to the *Académie Française*, a coveted position that would appear to establish him firmly as a French writer, his recent and

unprecedented resignation of that post signals his permanently liminal condition since, even after living all his life in Paris, he cites his American nationality as his reason for resigning: "Dans une lettre à ses pairs, où il s'affirme comme 'exclusivement' américain, le doyen de l'Académie, élu en 1971, estime que 'les honneurs ne l'intéressent pas du tout, quels qu'ils soient.'"<sup>1</sup> In my view, Green is a particularly good resource for the study of liminality, and his novels are a rich source of liminal figures. Carrel quotes him: "'J'ai essayé de retrouver un équilibre de plus en plus menacé par la dualité de ma nature'" (7). Green would appear to keep his equilibrium by writing about those who lose theirs.

Authorship of the texts in this study moves from the margins of the center of French literature out to the margins of the margins. The Hegelian dialectic that is suggested by the juxtaposition of Bataille's transgressivity and Green's Christianity is disrupted by a text from a different tradition, L'Amour, la fantasia, written by Assia Djebar, an Algerian woman of Muslim upbringing who writes in French but who expresses candidly her on-going quarrel with the French language. Djebar was born in 1936

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<sup>1</sup>"Julien Green quitte l'Académie française," L'Agence France-Presse, <http://www.humanite.presse.fr/journal/96/96-11/96-11-15/96-11-15-065.html> (15 novembre 1996).

and named Fatma-Zohra Imalhayène, but she took a pseudonym in 1957 when she published her first novel La Soif (Déjeux 10). A pseudonym can be a passage from experience to invention, and in this context, it serves as a kind of a veil. Gracki explains that "Djebar reached back into Arabic, part of her oral heritage, in order to select a sort of veil, a pen name, which would protect her family from the scandalous act of an Arab woman writing an erotic story" ("Writing" 835). Djebar is, in my view, the clearest example of liminality among these three authors, and her threshold status is highlighted in the critical discussion of her work, especially in reference to L'Amour, la fantasia. I wish to emphasize in my discussion of her text that Djebar creates a female narrator who is liminal in much the same way as Djebar is herself, and like Djebar, this narrator speaks for a community whose voice has yet to be heard.

In the second category, narratorial voice, a certain progression of liminality is evident as the narration moves from one narrator in Le Bleu du ciel to four in L'Autre to multiple narrators in L'Amour, la fantasia. Though as figures of fiction these narrators differ radically, there is a commonality found among them. The protagonists speaking in each text are all in a situation

of exile from their societies of origin and, therefore, find themselves liminal and relationally weak. As wayfarers, strangers, and exiles, these narrators have no established authority for telling their stories. However, there is a power available in this kind of weakness, a power derived from their own histories and the stories they have to tell in their particular situations. Ross Chambers in Story and Situation uses the metaphor of seduction as the strategy by which the narrator, because of his or her desire to tell, is able to engage the attention of those who desire a story:

[S]eduction, producing authority where there is no power, is a means of converting (historical) weakness into (discursive) strength. As such, it appears as a major weapon against alienation, an instrument of self-assertion, and an 'oppositional practice' of considerable significance. (212)

The narrators in these texts, however, are hindered in these efforts by the difficulties they encounter in relating their stories. In Le Bleu du ciel the narrator shocks his audience as he confesses his obsessions. The two protagonists of L'Autre speak to each other, but their longing is blocked by war and by religion. The narrator of L'Amour, la fantasia becomes a chorus or community of voices seeking an audience beyond the harem, speaking of the pain and suffering endured behind the barriers of written history, war, and the veil.

Derrida in "Living On / Borderlines," states: "The narratorial voice is the voice of a subject recounting something, remembering an event or a historical sequence, knowing who he is, where he is, and what he is talking about" (104). The narratorial voice is distinguished from the narrative voice which has no fixed place, but is "both placeless and over-placed" ("Living On" 104-105). In these texts the narratorial voice proliferates from a singular masculine vantage point to a male-female point and counterpoint, to a feminine position giving a voice, not only to a woman, but also to a nation. The liminality of the narratorial voice is apparent in all three texts, and the sense of liminality intensifies as that voice becomes feminine and then multiplies.

In the third category, the progression of feminine presence, the woman's voice proceeds from non-existent to polyphonic in the move from a single male narrator in Le Bleu du ciel to one woman narrator among the narratorial voices in L'Autre to multiple narrators, all women, in L'Amour, la fantasia. In each of these novels, there is a female in the opening scene. In Le Bleu du ciel the woman is drunk; in L'Autre the woman is dead; and in L'Amour, la fantasia she is a small girl going to school, an activity that sets her course into liminality.

Simone de Beauvoir describes the betwixt and between liminal state of women in Le Deuxième sexe, which was written in 1949: "[L]a femme d'aujourd'hui est écartelée entre le passé et l'avenir" (570). And almost thirty years later, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and others theorized the notion of *écriture féminine* which has had an impact not unlike that of Simone de Beauvoir's. However, whereas Beauvoir is concerned that a woman's intellectual capacities are subjugated to her biology, these women writers celebrate their biology as contributing to what they know. *Écriture féminine* encourages writing the body, writing about women and bringing women to writing. Cixous predicts: "We will rethink womankind beginning with every form and every period of her body" (Laugh 882). This process mediates a space for alternatives. Diane Elam in Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms. en abyme says that "feminism is about keeping sexual difference open as the space of a radical uncertainty. We do not yet know what women can do..." (Feminism 26). E. A. Grosz writes of a "transition from a feminism oriented to equality and opposed to sexism to one based on the specification of differences opposing theoretical phallocentrism" ("In(ter)vention" 96). Grosz describes this transition as a "moving from a feminism which takes women as its objects



of analysis . . . to a feminism which takes theory as its object of investigation, using the perspective of women's experiences" ("In(ter)vention" 97). To paraphrase Grosz, I propose that while women are not the object of analysis in this study, it will become evident, especially in the chapter on Djébar, that women's experiences can provide a good resource for the study of liminality.

In elaborating the liminal themes in these texts, I will rely on socioanthropology for the definition of liminality, on philosophy for its theoretical foundations, and on the protagonists' experiences in the three novels as illustrations.

Like structuralism, liminality is borrowed from the field of the social sciences. Arnold van Gennep used the term "liminal" in his 1909 book, Rites de Passage, to identify the middle phase of the three parts (separation from society, liminal interim, and reaggregation into the social structure) in any rite of passage. The notion had little immediate impact on social theory in part because van Gennep was excluded by Durkheim who was a major figure among French sociologists at that time (Belmont 2). Van Gennep's work lay dormant for fifty years.

In the 1960s after Rites of passage was translated into English, Victor Turner, a British anthropologist, began reading van Gennep during an interim period in his own

life. Turner began to make a connection between van Gennep's work, particularly his identification of the liminal phase in a rite of passage, and a stage in the rites of transition in Durkheim's theory that Durkheim called "effervescence" (see Durkheim 226). Turner deliberated on his own work with the Ndembu tribe, the work of van Gennep, and that of Durkheim while living in Hastings, England, awaiting passage to move permanently to America. "In that time of waiting by the English Channel, of being no longer quite British, not yet quite American, the Turners could feel some sympathy with other 'liminars,' as Turner would later call those in this condition" (Daly 70).

Turner wrote The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure (1969) using van Gennep's work basically as a point of departure. Van Gennep focused on a process that is intrinsic to any rite of passage and that inevitably leads to a return and reincorporation into the indigenous social structure, but Turner's interest was in the anti-structure of the liminal phase. In The Ritual Process he notes that van Gennep uses two sets of serial terms to analyze the tripartite process in a rite of passage: the first set, separation, margin, and reaggregation, has to do with social status; the other set, preliminal, liminal, and postliminal, pertains to space and time; all three terms in the last set are defined by the liminal.

When he discusses his first set of terms and applies them to data, van Gennep lays emphasis on . . . the 'structural' aspects of passage. Whereas his use of the second set indicates his basic concern with units of time and space. . . . Here liminality becomes central. (Ritual 166)

Turner's primary interest was in the second series - the spatiotemporal. He concentrated his study on the time spent in the liminal spaces outside of structures. "What I call liminality, the state of being in between successive considerations . . . is a sphere or domain of action or thought rather than a social modality" (Dramas 52).

It is significant that the margin and the liminal, in van Gennep's terminology, describe the same phase with slightly different emphases. The term "marginal" has come rather recently into everyday language as a metaphor borrowed from the printed page and used as an adjective describing those who are without status or power (Söderlind, 41-44). Marginality and liminality are so closely related that some theorists use them interchangeably. Turner does that also, but he makes a technical distinction labeling as liminal the change element in the interstices of structure while the marginal works at the structural edge (Ritual 128). Within a human self, both marginal and liminal forces are at work:

Unlike marginal qualities, which are visible but not emphasized from the view of the stable self-image, the liminal identity is one that involves a shift from the usual sense of self toward an

identity that is known to be different from the persona . . . and actually moves . . . toward a more comprehensive dominant self-image than the one transiently abandoned in the liminal state. (Hall 41)

Liminality is a change agent because it "both initiates and becomes the process of change" (Langdon 20). It initiates change by loosening the individual from the structures of custom and routine; it becomes the process of change by allowing participants to be other than they have been; and it, thereby, "directs their energies toward this otherness, often a new social identity or status" (Langdon 20).

In Turner's later work he coined the term "liminoid" to refer to the liminal experiences of people who live in complex industrial societies, and he reserved the term "liminal" to describe the transition of states in small, stable societies. "That distinction never really caught on--in part because the term 'liminoid' was 'gratingly neologistic'; in part because Turner himself had already coupled 'liminal' with phenomena other than tribal ritual" (Barcock 109). Liminal and liminality evolved in Turner's later work into terms with multi-faceted meanings.

While the sociological foundation is easily traced to van Gennep and Turner, the philosophical roots are more complicated. Van Gennep wrote in the philosophical era of

inevitable progress, and his theory has a dialectical basis. Hegelian progress is inscribed in the pattern of preliminal, liminal, and postliminal. However, the rational basis of the Hegelian model does not accommodate the full spectrum of human emotion:

Hegel left to one side the essential thing on which one must wager. . . . In short . . . those ecstasies which are the reverse side of and the objection to a complete rationality dreamed by the philosophers. . . . What remains, then, [is] . . . experiencing one's limits and feeling the fundamental continuity which fuses individuals together. (Besnier, "Emotive" 20)

Turner takes note of the fusing of individuals in the process of experiencing one's limits, and he coins the term, "communitas," a spontaneous "being no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but *with* one another" (Ritual 127) that he first observed in the rites of passage in the Ndembu tribe. Between and among the initiates, bonds were formed during a rite of passage that were of a different quality and depth from the relationships formed within structured society. A generic human bonding of this nature forms only in experiences one undergoes in the liminal phase that Turner describes as "anti-structure" and that must take place outside of structured society since structure holds people apart (Dramas 274). Turner delineates factors within the liminal that produce *communitas*, a hunger for union with others

created from the dislocations and deprivations experienced during the liminal state (Ritual 127-130). "Communitas . . . is intrinsically dynamic, never quite being realized" (Turner, Anthropology 84), but always capable of renovating relationships. Since liminality as *communitas* becomes the cohesive strength of any societal structure, "the strongest argument forwarded by Turner considers the dialectical relationship between structure and *communitas* so fundamental that society cannot survive without it" (Richman, "Introduction" 88). In chapter four I use *communitas* as an interpretive strategy and broaden the discussion to include the philosophical connections between Turner's *communitas* and "community" as discussed by Blanchot and Nancy.

Turner's work intersects philosophically with these and other contemporary thinkers that some would call "postmodern," a term that is itself currently debated. Elam defines the term in a way that I find useful here: "Postmodernism . . . is a way of thinking about history and representation that claims there can be no final understanding. . . . Boundaries . . . fail to maintain control over that which they are intended to delineate" (Romancing 10, 12). Turner uses the term to describe his own inclinations:

My own work for many years . . . is towards postmodern ways of thinking. Clearly the factor of indeterminacy has assumed greater importance in today's world. Historical events have played their part: wars, revolutions, the holocaust, the fall and fragmentation of colonial empires. But scientific developments in many fields have helped to undermine the modern views of time, space, matter, language, person, and truth. Processes of regularization are still potent in politics and economics. . . . In the sciences and humanities work is still done within the constraints of prestigious 'paradigms'. . . . Nevertheless, there is detectible an extensive breakdown of boundaries between various conventionally defined sciences and arts, and between these and modes of social reality. (Anthropology 79)

Victor Turner's interests freely transgressed boundaries of academic disciplines, and it is in this exercise that his activity is compatible with that of deconstructionists although he was never comfortable with their project. Frederick Turner uses the following analogy to explain Turner's perspective on the work of deconstructionists, making reference to a view of deconstruction that may not be accurate but is widely held:

[I]t is important to distinguish Turner's position from that of deconstructionists. Deconstructionist analysis . . . [maintains] that all meanings are a dancing over the void, and that the void is fundamental. Turner . . . [insists] that since the dancing is so much more substantial than the void, our definition of reality might as well . . . be tailored to fit the dancing rather than the void. (151)

Setting aside the labels that designate their differences, I would like to examine the similarities that

can be seen in the works of Derrida and of Turner who are both interested in the threshold, the border spaces and the passage. Both of their seminal works were done in the 1960s, a liminal period in the United States and in France. Turner wrote The Ritual Process in the decade in which great social unrest was initiated by the anti-structural activities of the hippie movement in the United States. By the time Turner died, he had developed the idea of liminality borrowed from van Gennep into a highly defined but ever expanding concept. The *limen* becomes an elongated passage or a unending corridor. Firmat observes: "While for van Gennep the *limen* is always a threshold, for Turner it can also be a place of habitation" (xiv). It is as though he put liminality under a microscope and studied it. In doing so, he realized that changes that occur in the process can be so slow and minuscule that the liminal "may cease to be a mere transition and become a set way of life" (Turner, Trail 49).

The sixties' upheaval in French society culminated in the student-led strike in 1968, and this milieu was the setting in which Derrida began writing about the instability of meaning in language - the spoken as well as the written. In De la grammatologie he takes issue with the privileged position Ferdinand de Saussure gives speech



over writing. Derrida points out that the polyvalent aspect of the spoken word is as destabilizing as is the distance between the author and reader of the written word. Derrida challenges hegemony by calling hierarchies into question and consistently reconfigures space in order to bring the marginal into play with and against the supposed center. Speech and writing, like the hegemonic center and the margin, reverberate against each other; in Marges Derrida uses the figure of the tympan both in its function in the inner ear and as a part of a printing press to illustrate how vertiginous and repetitive this reverberation can be. "Cette répercussion vannée déjà d'un type qui n'a pas encore sonné, ce temps timbré entre l'écriture and la parole (s') appellent un *coup de donc*" (xxv). Derrida's intense focus is on the border space or the limit: "Et si le tympan est une limite, il s'agirait peut-être moins de déplacer telle limite déterminée que de travailler au concept de limite et à la limite du concept" (Marges ix).

In "Living On / Borderlines" Derrida points out that the entrance into anything, including a text, involves crossing borders or margins; a text is usually entered from its upper edge, its title, but once inside the text, one finds other texts (either paraphrased or in quotation

marks) which results in a loss "of any line of demarcation between a text and what is outside it" (82). Binary oppositions such as inside/outside are often not clearly decidable, and Derrida uses the term "undecidability" as a philosophical idea which often leaves his readers undecided. One must ponder over a statement like: "The question of the woman suspends the decidable opposition of true and non-true and inaugurates the epochal regime of quotation marks which is to be enforced for every concept belonging to the system of philosophical decidability." (Éperons 107). Alice Jardine describes the labyrinthine nature of Derrida's work:

Working through the 'between' and the 'what's more' (en plus) in a movement impossible to describe, it upsets all boundaries, inside, outside, up and down. . . . Writing is the 'general space' that disrupts all presence and absence and therefore all metaphysical notions of limits. (Gynesis 184)

I maintain that Turner's sociological label, "liminality" describes some of the same phenonema that Derrida discusses using philosophical terms such as "undecidability" and "aporia." Through the juxtaposition of various passages from Turner with selections from Derrida, especially his "Apories," I wish to illustrate the intersection of their positions. In "Apories" Derrida describes the somewhat paradoxical incidence of being on

the way to aporia: "Le 'j'entre', en passant le seuil, le 'je passe' (peraô) nous met ainsi, si je puis dire, sur la voie de l'aporos ou de l'aporia" ("Apories" 312). He creates a tension between the idea of aporia and the existence of a problem. "Le passage des frontières s'annonce toujours selon le mouvement d'un certain pas - et du pas franchissant une ligne. . . . [L]e passage de la ligne devient un *problème*" (313). Derrida describes aporia:

[E]n ce mot il devait y aller du 'ne pas savoir où aller', du non-passage, . . . nous paralysant en cette séparation de façon non nécessairement négative : devant une porte, un seuil, une frontière, une ligne, ou tout simplement le bord ou l'abord de l'autre comme tel. (313)

In Turner's liminality "the state of the ritual subject (the 'passenger,' or 'liminar,') becomes ambiguous, neither here nor there, betwixt and between all fixed points of classification" (Dramas 232). And in describing the liminal figures, Turner writes:

Thus, liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness. . . . Liminal entities . . . may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked. (Ritual 95)

Derrida states: "[L]e projet même ou la tâche problématique devient impossible et . . . nous sommes absolument exposés sans protection, sans problème et sans prothèse, . . .

singulièrement exposés dans notre unicité absolue et absolument nue" ("Apories" 313). For Derrida aporia is a function of an undecidability which he conceives as an active process: it constitutes the space and time to decide. He says in the introduction to Parages: "Mais l'événement - rencontre, décision, appel, nomination, initiale incision d'une marque - ne peut advenir que depuis l'expérience de l'indécidable" (15). In order for a decision to occur, it must be preceded by a period of undecidability, and this period coincides with Turner's liminality: "All is in motion but some social flows move so slowly relatively to others that they seem almost as fixed and stationary as the landscape and the geographical levels under it, though these too, are, of course, forever in flux" (Dramas 44).

The space given to the explanation of liminality is simply preparatory to the application of this notion to literature. Langdon observes: "This liminality, where no passage is possible . . . is the condition of exile and extinction which has become a dominant subject in many literatures during the last hundred years" (5). For most of that time, the condition was described using words other than liminality. In recent years, however, liminal and liminality have appeared as interpretive strategies in

readings of various literary texts. I have already referenced several examples of the linking of liminality and literary analysis: Richman assesses Bataille's experience with the Collège de sociologie as a liminal experience; Langdon, whose Ritual Passages and Narrative Structures I have quoted above, places the reader in the position of an initiate in a rite of passage experience, and he notes the homological relationship between van Gennep's tripartite model of rites of passage and the beginning, middle, and end of a story; Mary Ann Caws in Metapoetics of the Passage uses the term liminal to describe the poetry of the French Surrealists and poets that followed them; and Kathleen Ashley, in her collection of essays, Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism, explores literature and anthropology from various perspectives, one of which is Robert Daly's discussion of liminality as the crucial factor in the founding of the American culture which he illustrates with the fictions of Cooper, Hawthorne, Cather, and Fitzgerald. In the same text, Barbara Babcock discusses liminality and reflexivity in Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts.

A survey of other titles on the subject indicates that liminality is applicable to a variety of literary genres. In The Wreath of Wild Olive: Play, Liminality, and the

Study of Literature, Mihai Spariosu discusses a wide range of philosophical and literary subjects, including Ruskin, Orwell, and Oscar Wilde, in order to advance his view of literature and literary criticism as ludic-irenic play:

Prominent scholars such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Victor Turner have seen liminality in the context of a dynamic between the center and the margin of a given system, with the margin either reinforcing or undermining the center. My essay, by contrast, attempts to develop a ludic-irenic view of liminality as a margin that permanently detaches itself from the center (any center), thus providing a playful opening toward alternative worlds that are incommensurable with ours. . . . [L]iterature is best seen. . . as a liminal phenomenon that can . . . act as a threshold or passageway from one historical world to another. (xiii)

In "Liminality: An Approach to Artistic Process in Endgame," Susan Maughlin discusses Beckett's play: "Change occurs in Endgame. . . . Victor Turner describes liminality as a stage of transition and change in which paradox is created to expose the building blocks of a culture" (86). In another example, change that infiltrates and exposes societal structures is the focus of Carey Wall's discussion of Eudora Welty's Delta Wedding. Wall uses this novel as an example of liminality that is evident in the fiction incubated in the Southern plantation society in the United States.

One of the first articles to appear on liminality as a literary theme was Thomas Pison's "Liminality in The

Canterbury Tales" in which he discusses the pilgrims to Canterbury who were no longer wholly of the inn, but had not yet arrived at the shrine; they were in a structural contradiction. "It is essential to note that to be alive in an inn is to be dead in the church and vice versa" (160). However, the carefree celebration and human leveling of the pilgrimage cannot last, and at the end, the Parson's sermon prepares the group for reintegration into ordered society. Pison concludes:

The pleasures of the journey along the way -- the unfamiliar *communitas* of marginality -- insure that the frequent painfulness of stability at its end will not be unalloyed, as human nature is permitted to permeate the human condition. (171)

In "Liminality, Anti-liminality, and the Victorian Novel" Sarah Gilead argues that in nineteenth-century English fiction the liminal is a kind of release: "The liminal figure provides for his audience a vicarious experience that offers a kind of safety valve for the hostility or frustration engendered in the limitations of structured life" (184). She cites examples from the Victorian novels in which the liminal gestures take place "entirely within social structure as part of the games of social strategy" (192). Jane Eyre, a Victorian novel discussed by Gilead, is the subject of Mark Hennelly's "Contrast and Liminality: Structure and Antistructure in

Jane Eyre." Hennelly notices the strong emphasis on liminal time frames like twilight, midnight, and solstice intervals as well as the frequent mention of localities such as gates, doors, windows, stairs, and crossroads. Hennelly considers "Jane as a model of 'arrested' or 'prolonged' liminality as she tries to transform and to reintegrate herself into society without sacrificing or even compromising her antistructural ideals" (93-94).

In twentieth-century novels generally, and in the three texts under study here specifically, the condition of liminality is not a temporary condition or a safety valve for the rest of society, but a way of life in which the liminal phase is elongated to such an extent as to have become a way of life - a kind of existential aporia. In The Liminal Novel, a work on three twentieth-century Francophone African writers, Wangarĩ wa Nyatetũ-Waigwa observes this on-going liminality:

[L]iminality is a structuring principle. . . . It colors each major image, each event, each place, and it subverts, for instance, the idyllic nature of the African setting. . . . [W]e shall see . . . how the protagonist of each novel is portrayed in a 'betwixt and between' relationship with the worlds he has inhabited only marginally, and how the question of his belonging to any world has become provisionally unresolvable. (8, 10)

That situation is also applicable to the novels under consideration here for one of the clearest examples of



liminality in modern cultures occurs when an individual transgresses or breaks with his or her societal origins, crosses national borders, and spends time in another culture. The protagonists of all three texts experience this break, but, in contrast to those undergoing tribal rites of passage, none of these liminal figures ever reaggregates into the society from which they broke away; consequently, their marginality remains continuous. The narratorial voices I will examine in chapters two through four confirm Turner's statement: "Transition has here become a permanent condition" (Ritual 107).

In my reading of the novels in this study, I rely not only on Turner's work on liminality and *communitas* but also on Derrida's categories of undecidability and aporia. Drawing upon Turner's and Derrida's sociological and philosophical works, I have selected three characteristics that I believe are intrinsic to liminality: some type of transgressivity, a search for sacred meaning, and a potential for *communitas*. While all of these traits are evident in all three novels, I emphasize transgressivity in Le Bleu du ciel, the search for the sacred in L'Autre, and *communitas* in L'Amour, la fantasia.

In chapter two I will argue that transgressivity, by its violation of conventions and norms, places one in

liminality where traditional values are suspended and undecidability becomes the norm. In Le Bleu du ciel Troppmann, the narrator, goes from London to Paris to Barcelona and then to Germany. He searches for relief from his fears but feels powerless in the face of his own impotence and the visions he has of a forthcoming apocalypse. His narration is punctuated with numerous ellipses, and these leave the reader to imagine what is not told. Descriptions of his hallucinations, dreams, and bizarre activities reveal the circuitous, serpentine nature of his thinking. His is a world where eros undermines logos.

Troppmann never lacks for female companionship and transgresses every mode of bourgeois respectability with regard to women who seem exaggerated both in their own transgressivity and in their spiritual powers. Women are drawn to Troppmann, and he is always on the verge of throwing himself at the feet of a woman as though she were some kind of goddess. The *jouissance* of his union with Dirty is prolonged by their slide down the hillside; it is a moment that combines the mystic, the erotic, and the ecstatic for Troppmann. Following this long-awaited climax, Dirty and Troppmann leave on separate trains.

Troppmann and his associates are illustrative of a particularly Bataillian slant on the life experience of a transgressor. The intersection in the narrative of transgression and affirmation releases the subversive power of transgressivity. Transgression can have a liberating effect because by transgressing the boundaries of the past and by living in liminality, the transgressor facilitates increased flexibility for the present and the future. Bataille, in his work in the 1930s and through his transgressive writings, can be seen to have opened space for the present critical inquiry into philosophy and literature.

While transgressive subject matter is not a novel theme for any work of fiction, the subject of religious conversion is highly unusual in a twentieth-century novel written in French. In chapter three I maintain that religious experience is undeniably liminal and that the experience of liminality involves a search for sacred meaning. In L'Autre both protagonists find themselves in liminality as foreigners in the society around them. In Roger's narration he is a French student-tourist in Copenhagen in 1939 on the eve of the Second World War. He describes the liminal places he and Karin frequent during their brief romance before Roger returns to France.

Ten years later, in Karin's part of the narrative, the reader learns of the ostracism she, having become known as "l'Allemande," has endured since the Germans left her city. She writes her story in response to letters she receives from Roger in which he tells of a succession of events in his life: being a prisoner of war; deciding to enter the priesthood; and returning briefly to Copenhagen. Karen seeks to renew a romantic relationship with Roger and to experience a renewed faith in God. The recovery of religious faith runs counter to the hegemony of the rational modern age, and Karin's narration sometimes loses rationality. She rejects any semblance of women's traditional roles in the pursuit of her own interests and is, in the end, pursued to her death, chased over the edge of the wharf by two anonymous thugs. Like Troppmann, Roger ends up as a passenger and, like Karin, he is at sea, but while she has drowned, he is on a ship to South America, a notably unstable locale; he writes in his last letter that his latest vocational plans are to become an architect.

In Green's text the switch to a woman narrator who takes a pen in hand and writes her novel supports the contention that women have moved into a state of liminality since World War II, and one manifestation of that move has been that more women are being published as writers. This

has opened wide a space for fiction writers who are the "other" to European and American men.

One novel written by a woman, L'Amour, la fantasia, speaks for a community of others, and the focus of chapter four is *communitas*/community. In a work that is a mixture of autobiography, history, and fiction, the narrator moves between centuries as well as between cultures, her own and that of the French colonizers.

The veil is mentioned in the beginning accounts of both centuries and is emblematic of the differences between the French and Algerian cultures. It has a metonymic relationship both with structure and anti-structure. The tradition of women wearing the veil works to protect the structures of a patriarchal Islamic society (Mernissi 4). However, during the fight for Algerian independence, the veil aided the forces at work as the anti-structure to French dominance because it protected the anonymity of women carrying bombs and other subversive war materials into strategic locations. The narrator transgresses her own culture by not taking the veil; however, the French language serves to veil her from other Algerians. She then uses the French language to protest against the French.

She depicts the plight of the women of Algeria using the conqueror's language. She transcribes women's voices,

their screams, and their silence. She reveals and remembers their bodies, and she gives women a forum that becomes the site of *communitas* beyond the harem. The universality of the French language allows her to successfully share the voice of the text with other Algerian women for the benefit of a world-wide community. However, the narrator never moves beyond her own undecidability in regard to her own culture, and at the end she prophetically hears the death cry of the fantasia bringing bloodshed to her land again.

The aspects of liminality discussed in these texts are pertinent to all literature because, as I suggest in chapters two and three, liminality can challenge the static by transgressing norms, and it can function to open texts to a search for meaning. In chapter four, the implications of liminality for relationship and for community are examined. In chapters three and four, I propose the notion that writing is itself a *limen*, a threshold that opens onto another world through a passage from experience to creation. Writing is aporetic in that it remains in flux to be reconstituted by the reader who is, in the process of reading, participating in another liminal experience.

In chapter five I consider the impact of all this in the wider discussion of literature, and inquire into its

significance for literary studies. In studying the functions of liminality in literature, I wish to preserve the fuller meaning of the term "literature" to refer both to that which is written and read as literature and to that which is written about it, i.e., literary studies (theory and criticism). In the fifty-year span between the writing of Le Bleu du ciel (1935) and the publishing of L'Amour, la fantasia, (1985), the study of literature experienced a great deal of turbulence. Contributing influences, as reflected in the discussion above, were social and political factors brought on by the Second World War and the power shifts that followed upon the subsequent fall of colonial governments. The work of Derrida and his project of deconstruction brought this upheaval into academic circles by upending long-established hierarchies in logocentric thinking, exposing the instability of language, and moving the study of literature towards the margins of philosophy. The outcome has affected not only how literature is read, but also what is read as literature. Langdon remarks: "One unquestionable benefit of deconstruction has been to expose the distortions, repressions, and marginalizations the canon (or any canon) necessarily entails" (Langdon 1).

Feminists find this disruption fortuitous since it provides a space and time to hear voices from the borders, voices that were previously suppressed. As Joan W. Scott notes: "Concern with gender as an analytic category has emerged only in the late twentieth century. It is absent from the major bodies of social theory articulated from the eighteenth to the early twentieth centuries" (92). Scott points out that the recent emergence of this concern has taken place "at a moment of great epistemological turmoil" (93). As stated above, women, like Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray, have added to the epistemology by developing a theory they call *écriture féminine*. Jardine asks "Why, at the end of the twentieth century, has 'the feminine' become a wide-ranging area of concern?" (Gynesis 27). My study proposes, among other things, that to try to answer Jardine's question is to explore liminality.



CHAPTER II: TRANSGRESSIVITY:  
GEORGES BATAILLE'S LE BLEU DU CIEL

Transgressivity produces a mercurial quality in those who violate social constraints of practicality, common sense, and traditional morality. Turner defines this quality as liminality. In the context of a rite of passage, he discusses the role transgression plays:

"Accepted schemata and paradigms must be broken if initiates are to cope with novelty and danger" (Dramas 256). As was stated in chapter one, Turner used some of Durkheim's research as a catalyst in the development of theories of liminality. Some of Durkheim's sociological data was also instrumental in Bataille's work on transgression (Richman Gift 36).

Transgression, in the broadest sense, can simply imply an act of passing over or going beyond conventional expectations, and this kind of transgression may render one liminal, at least temporarily. Bataille insists on the equal importance of both imposing and trespassing interdictions: "*Mais la transgression . . . lève l'interdit sans le supprimer. Là se cache le ressort de l'érotisme, là se trouve en même temps le ressort des religions*" (L'Érotisme 42). The erotic and the sacred are liminal spaces between life and death. The freedom gained in the liminal interim created by transgression becomes the

province of the sexual and of the spiritual moment. The space of rupture and of trespassed limits is the site of polyvalence and undecidability. Derrida speculates:

"Peut-être rien ne se passe-t-il jamais que sur la ligne d'une transgression, le trépas de quelque 'trespassing'"

("Apories" 321). Trespassing or crossing over a line is formidable because any threshold can represent an encounter with death at the final threshold. The sense of liminality increases as the degree of violation intensifies. Le Bleu du ciel brings one into the proximity of death and provokes feelings of disgust, alarm, and fear in regard to graphic body wastes, scatology, and incestuous necrophilia. Michel Surya, in his biography, Georges Bataille: La mort à l'oeuvre summarizes this text: "Le cauchemar, l'impuissance et le carnage sont trois mot-clés du Bleu du ciel; et c'est sur eux que se reforme le récit" (223).

In reviewing the literature written about this novel, it becomes apparent that many commentators writing on Le Bleu du ciel seem to be most interested in its political themes. In order to emphasize the undecidability and polyvalence that reside in this text, I want to call attention to the wide variance of interpretations given to Troppmann's politics - some read it as fascist, others as leftist, and some as undecided.

In his article "Bleu du ciel: Psychoanalyse de la politique," Peter Collier discusses Troppmann as the impotent left-leaning intellectual with a compulsive attraction toward violence and death that divulges a deep-seated fascism. "Cet extrémiste de gauche a le coeur fasciste, il est plus heureux entouré d'activités de droite que parmi les intellectuels scrupuleux à qui sa raison donne raison" (Collier 75). Daniel Hawley states that in Le Bleu du ciel since war represents entrance into a world of inverted values in which one's authority is derived solely from the interior life, in Troppmann's view, war is not undesirable. In Hawley's opinion, this raises a question regarding Bataille's own sentiments on war and the forces that would precipitate it: "Tout renverser était le rêve de Troppmann, et sans doute aussi celui de Bataille lui-même" (65). Leo Bersani in The Culture of Redemption observes that Bataille ambiguously figures violence in Le Bleu du ciel which prevents us from deluding ourselves that we are not complicitous with it.

Those who insist that there are evidences in Le Bleu du ciel of Bataille's loyalty to leftist causes point to certain details of the text. Hollier in "Le Rose et le noir" contends that Troppmann expresses feelings of guilt by his refusal to assist in the workers insurrection, and this sentiment indicates an underlying and undying

allegiance to the proletariat - "c'est celui d'un bourgeois nécrophile et masochiste qui a déjà souscrit, au nom de la vérité et de la justice à la cause de ses fossoyeurs prolétariens" (117). Stoekl in Politics, Mutilation, Writing says that in Le Bleu du ciel Bataille is obsessed by the contradiction that he felt existed between the progressive political revolution and the affirmation of sexual effervescence and expenditure. While his essays exude a confidence in Marxism and the possibility that it can be identified with a sexuality that is explosive and an extravagant expenditure, his fiction reveals a sense of exhaustion and despair.

Like many on the left, Bataille recognized an affinity between the tendency to 'expend' and fascism, and he also recognized that delirious crowds, ecstatic destructive drives, and the glamour of excess may be compatible less with the 'Front populaire' than with the Führer. (4)

Stoekl cites the Don Juan motif as exemplifying the internal battle between militarism represented by the Commander and eroticism symbolized by Don Juan.

Others read a political indifference reflected in Le Bleu du ciel. In "Writing and Politics, Cryptology of a Novel" Heimonet's thesis is that this novel, which he calls "the only true novel ever written by Bataille," (278) is a non-response to the political environment in which it was written because that is the only response viable in a

situation oversaturated with opinions of the right and of the left. Suleiman contends in her article, "Bataille in the street: The search for virility in the 1930s," that obsession with the question of virility is symptomatic of the impotence of the age in which this text was written. The street is a locus of power with demonstrations of support for political causes of the right and the left during this era. But Troppmann is powerless in the street, feels himself child-like and lost. He sublimates the ambiguities in the political scene to his concern for his own virility. Smock and Zuckerman in "Politics and Eroticism in Le Bleu du ciel" consider ambivalence to be evident in the distance that Bataille claims to put between himself and this novel evidenced in his explanation in the *Avant-Propos* that it was something he had to write, but that once it was written, he then forgot it. Consequently, a distance inhabits this text that "could be taken as the critical distance we ourselves should maintain from Le Bleu de ciel" (58). This distance allows us to see the indecisive vacillations present in Troppmann as constitutive of a position that cannot be accepted or rejected and for that reason, the text remains open and highly subversive. Hollier states that the Don Juan/Commander motif is an evidence of the undecidable. "[L]e Commandeur appartient chez Bataille à cette zone d'intérêt

ambivalent où l'attraction ne se distingue pas de la répulsion, où l'horrible est aussi désirable et parfois même en tant qu'horrible" ("Rose" 113). The simultaneity of the preoccupation with the erotic and the political which are personified in the text by the figures of Troppmann and Lazare is another evidence of the undecidable because Troppmann feels himself totally repelled by Lazare and her politics but is also strongly attracted to her.

L'incompatibilité réciproque de Troppmann et de Lazare illustre sans doute le fait que le sexuel et le politique sont trop allergiques l'un à l'autre pour communiquer. . . . Leur partage est à la fois nécessaire et indécidable. (Hollier, "Rose" 110)

I conclude that the inability to categorize Troppmann politically indicates that he is politically liminal or in the anti-structures of politics. While my reading of Le Bleu du ciel does not avoid the political, the focus is primarily on the transgressivity that prompts liminality, and I note how that is reflected in the authority of its author, in the narratorial voice, and in the feminine presence.

Le Bleu du ciel was one of only two novels published under Bataille's own name during his lifetime (Suleiman, Subversive 222). It is composed out of a pastiche of his writing with an introduction written originally in 1926 and an *avant-propos* that he added when he published it in 1957

(III 560).<sup>2</sup> It would seem that Bataille was partial to Le Bleu du ciel as a title since he used it several times. Perhaps it signifies an infinite void and an absence of limits (V 93). His first published work under the title "Le Bleu du ciel" was an article he wrote in 1936 in Minotaure; then in 1943 he gave that title to a segment in part three of L'Expérience intérieure in which he reproduced some passages from this novel that he wrote in 1935 with only slight variations (Hawley 52).

The introduction to Le Bleu du ciel, the novel, was originally part of a manuscript entitled W.-C. that he had written in 1926 of which only this fragment remains since he chose to destroy the rest. W.-C. was, "in Bataille's estimation, a book 'violently opposed to all dignity' . . . and eventually caused Bataille to undergo a psychoanalytic cure" (Stoekl, Visions x). The fragment he saved from burning was published under the title of Dirty in 1947, ten years before its appearance as the introduction to Le Bleu du ciel (Surya 489). This reuse of titles and materials represents a kind of transgression of the probity of a given text, but it also represents the repetitive efforts of the writer to express the inexpressible.

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<sup>2</sup>References from the Oeuvres Complètes of Bataille will be cited in the text in parentheses with the volume number in roman numerals followed by the page number.

Bataille's authority as a writer of fiction is marginalized because of his scatological and erotic content and the inclusion of subversive philosophical notions in his novel. I will attempt to relate how by questioning philosophical theories and by transgressing the limits of conventional tastes, Bataille gives insight into the manner in which liminality functions to bring about change even though that change may be undecided in its direction and suppressed by the existing hegemony.

Scatology and eroticism, two operations of transgressive literature, characterize his fiction, and this practice undoes the hierarchical system of aesthetic judgment. When substances that were once within the body are eliminated from it, they become liminal - they belong to the body, but they are separated from it. Douglas explains the analogy of the human body to that of any closed system:

The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. . . . We cannot possibly interpret rituals concerning excreta, breast milk, saliva and the rest unless we are prepared to see in the body a symbol of society, and to see the powers and dangers credited to social structure reproduced in small on the human body. . . . We should expect the orifices of the body to symbolise its specially vulnerable points. Matter issuing from them is marginal stuff of the most obvious kind. Spittle, blood, milk, urine, faeces or tears by simply issuing forth have traversed the boundary. (Douglas 115, 121)



When bodily wastes are created in unlikely places as in the narrative content of a novel, their liminality becomes transgressive and the "otherness" of these substances challenges the toleration of those to whom it is presented. The mixing of bodily secretions into well-written prose offends the sensibilities and frustrates the readers who cannot classify the writing as trash because it is well written; on the other hand, they cannot classify it as good literature because of its offensive content.

Bataille's purpose, it seems to me, was to challenge the emphasis on rationality in Western thought, and his method for doing so was through a presentation of a "headless" philosophy that places the focus on the parts of the human body that are below the head and on the bodily functions of elimination and orgasm as a means of attack on the rational foundations of Western philosophy. Bataille states in the *Avant-propos* to Le Bleu du ciel that he is writing for the reader who, like himself, is tired of the suffocating limits of convention: "Je le crois : seule l'épreuve suffocante, impossible, donne à l'auteur le moyen d'atteindre la vision lointaine attendue par un lecteur las des proches limites imposées par les conventions" (III 381). Essential to Bataille's challenge to convention is his writing about eroticism. He states: "De l'érotisme, il est possible de dire qu'il est l'approbation de la vie jusque dans la mort" (L'Érotisme 17). The erotic

functions to create a space where being becomes a liminality between life and death. In this border space that transgresses the line between living and dying, possibilities of sacred meaning and *communitas* are found. A mystical experience - a kind of Orphic mysticism - accompanies the visit into death made possible for him in eroticism.

Being, in Bataille's view, cannot be analyzed apart from all the ranges and passions of human behavior. He writes: "L'érotisme est dans la conscience de l'homme ce qui met en lui l'être en question" (L'Erotisme, 35). Eroticism heightens the sense of being alive because ecstasy is derived from arriving at the threshold of death. Hollier comments on the function of eroticism in Bataille's writing:

Eroticism undoes the theoretical space of the logos in which science maintained its processes. . . . Eroticism opens beings to a slippery action where they give themselves over and are lost, where their excess leaves them wanting. (Against 74)

At one point in Le Bleu du ciel, Troppmann says: "Je riaais en pensant . . . je n'ai su que perdre la tête" (III 454), and Dirty later remarks in exasperation: "Si seulement tu pouvais perdre la tête!" (III 477). She suggests an experience of delirious abandon, of his losing his head in order to regain his libido.

Transgressive literature allows for a process of philosophical contestation, which, as Shaviro suggests concerning Bataille, "is transgressive and subversive, and not evaluative or descriptive. Where philosophy seeks to define or delimit a given notion . . . Bataille's continual effort is to de-define it, to un-ground it" (77). Bataille's fiction seems to be the liminal space where he experiments with his ideas before incorporating them into a more systematic discourse in his philosophical writing. Laurens ten Kate writes: "Il est lui-même le personnage d'une quête, *cheminant* à travers fiction et philosophie" (10).

Le Bleu du ciel remains now, sixty years after it was written and forty years after its publication, a marginal text. And yet, Bataille is widely quoted in the philosophical writings of many literary theorists in the latter decades of the twentieth century. Many of these writers, like Bataille, are seeking to open the system by transgressing its limits, and this makes him a kind of model of liminality - an authoritative source for those who wish to challenge authority. Transgressivity provokes a dynamic that opens the possibility of change since a line, once it is trespassed, is rarely replaced in the same location. Richman observes: "Transgression supersedes, without totally eliminating, the original negated condition or limit. Nor does the forbidden boundary necessarily

resume the same position from which it was temporarily lifted" (Gift 110). In his writing Bataille seems to be initiating change by making a space in literature for a fuller range of expression. A question about the specific kind of change that Bataille sought is ultimately unanswerable. Nancy writes: "[W]hen he stole away, he also stole from us access to what he was communicating to us" ("Excription" 60). However, Bataille's work is fertile ground for innovation in theoretical discourse as recent developments in literary criticism have illustrated.

Suleiman explains:

The French literary and philosophical avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s found in Bataille's work an *exemplariness* that went far beyond a mere desire for paradox. . . . [I]t was in the 1960s that the potential for a metaphoric equivalence between the violation of *sexual* taboos and the violation of *discursive* norms that we associate with the theory of textuality became fully elaborated. And it is here that both Bataille's practice as a writer and his thought as a philosopher became a central reference. (Subversive 73)

Bataille's influence can be neither measured nor overstated. His theories have presented a challenge to Western logic and have influenced most literary theorists writing today. For example, Richman in her chapter "Reading Bataille in History" elaborates on the importance he holds in deconstruction theory: "Derrida states that his major texts constitute a reading of Bataille" (Gift 141).

In Le Bleu du ciel, the narratorial voice is the first person voice of Henri Troppmann. If one could know Troppmann strictly from observable behaviors, his persona to the outside world might present an urbane, detached, modern figure, a city dweller, who knows his way around, who casually enters and exits the cafes, and who travels often outside his country. But he becomes illogical, unstable, and ambiguous as he narrates his interior life revealing his own sense of deficiency, his innermost desires, and his activities, many of which represent a violation of society's sense of propriety and moral rightness. Suleiman observes: "In . . . any transgressive experience, the limits of the self become unstable, 'sliding'" (Subversive 75). It is through the narratorial voice in the text, which is Troppmann's inner voice, that he reveals his liminal state.

In discussing the narratorial voice in this chapter, I will mention (in a Bataillian mode of interior/exterior oppositions) first the indoor places and then the interior life of the narrator as he speaks of his obsessions, visions, and dreams. Next, I will discuss the outdoor places and the outward behaviors; finally I will write about the openness within the structure of the narration.

In the first sentence of this novel, liminality is plainly indicated in the inebriated condition of Dirty and Troppmann and in their location, a London dive, which

requires several prepositions to sufficiently marginalize it: "Dans un bouge de quartier de Londres, dans un lieu hétéroclite des plus sales, au sous-sol, Dirty était ivre. Elle l'était au dernier degré" (III 385). The incongruities are striking as Dirty, rich and beautiful in her sumptuous evening gown, is situated in the throes of an alcohol-induced convulsion in a rat-infested dive.

Troppmann next describes an experience in their hotel room, a place which, in the generic sense, implies transience for all its clientele, even for those who are wealthy enough to stay in the Hotel Savoy in London. Troppmann considers the flexible nature of transgressivity to offend regardless of the context: "une facilité merveilleuse : nous réussissions à nous passer n'importe quelle envie, au mépris des cloisons établis, aussi bien dans la chambre du Savoy que dans le bouge, où nous pouvions" (III, 391).

Intoxication can be a ticket to patterns of dependency and lack of control that are normally associated with an infant. Within the elegant, affluent surroundings of this hotel, Dirty, in her drunken state, becomes deliberately incontinent.

Les domestiques terrifiés virent un filet d'eau couler le long de la chaise et des jambes de leur belle interlocutrice : l'urine forma une flaque qui s'agrandit sur le tapis tandis qu'un bruit d'entrailles relâchées se produisait lourdement sous la robe de la jeune fille. . . . (III 389)

This scene of defecation and debauchery in the introduction of this novel is a statement that nothing is off limits in this text. Pasi writes: "L'excrétion devient alors le signe déterminant de ce qui, dans son incompatibilité, demeure différence, inquiétante et irréductible" (144). It is also significant that the liminal elements are immediately removed in order to restore the room to the Savoy standards of civility and cleanliness: "La femme de chambre, écoeurée et tremblante, dut laver Dirty qui paraissait redevenue calme et heureuse. . . . Le liftier aéra la chambre jusqu'à ce que l'odeur ait tout à fait disparu" (III 389). Dirty's offensive acts, as described by Troppmann, are not just mild assaults on bourgeois manners but rather a voluntary raid on her environment, soiling first the interior and then the exterior: "Péniblement, Dirty alla jusqu'à la fenêtre. Elle vit sous elle . . . des bâtiments les plus monstrueux de Londres, agrandis par l'obscurité. Elle vomit rapidement à l'air libre" (III 390-391). This indiscriminate disposal of body wastes indicates a refutation of conventionality from the very core of her own being.

Most of the indoor scenes in this novel take place in some version of the two localities mentioned in the introduction: a bar or a hotel. In both of these places, clients come and go making temporariness the status quo. In another context, Derrida writes about the hotel:

Ce qu'est une chambre, si anonyme, si  
paradigmatique, commençait à devenir ce qu'elle  
est, une chambre, par exemple dans la neutralité  
d'un hôtel et de ses hôtes, nous ne le savons pas  
'avant' la logique - ou plutôt, la phoronomie  
atopique - de ce pas. (Derrida, Parages 28)

Troppmann and Dirty seem to be at home in this kind of  
impermanence. Troppmann appears to be the most ill-at-ease  
when he is actually in someone's home. When he visits  
Lazare in her apartment, he comments: "Quand la porte de  
la chambre se fut fermée derrière moi. . . je ressentis une  
fatigue et un mal au coeur plus gênants que jamais" (III  
421). His own home is the place he goes when he is sick;  
it receives the refuse of a life spent elsewhere. "Je n'ai  
pas touché au petit déjeuner que déposa ma belle-mère à mon  
chevet. Mon envie de vomir durait. . . . Après le  
vomissement, je me suis recouché. . . . Le médecin vint"  
(III 425-426). The severity of his illness keeps him  
homebound, but it does not diminish his transgressive  
interests.

The hallucinatory nature of his thinking during his  
illness pervades the interior life of the narrator as his  
visions and dreams give insight into his obsessions that  
are the driving force of the *récit*. His passion for women  
and death combine in an especially transgressive erotic  
desire for dead women. More than once during the *récit*,



Troppmann intimates a sexual experience with his dead mother. He tries to explain:

Quand ma mère est morte. . . . Les pieds nus, je m'avançais dans le couloir en tremblant... Je tremblais de peur et d'excitation devant le cadavre, à bout d'excitation... j'étais en transe... J'enlevai mon pyjama... je me suis... tu comprends.... (III 433-434)

In this passage filled with ellipses, it seems the narratorial voice cannot get it said but feels compelled to keep trying. Could it be that what he is unable to say about this double perversion - the Oedipal desire for the dead woman - is that he has always been at a loss in relating to women? He seems to have an inordinate need to shock the women in his life because he insists on reciting this incident to women with whom he develops rapport. In the experience with the cadavre, his love affair with death takes him to the brink of successful orgasm, an attainment frustrated in his experience with women who are alive and well.

An attraction to the liminality of the ultimate otherness that is death permeates this text. The first instance is in the short enigmatic passage entitled "Première Partie," printed in italics, following the Introduction. Although the Première Partie is narrated anonymously, the description of the visit of the Commander connects this part to Troppmann because in the Deuxième Partie he relates the experience, or one almost identical,

as his own nightmare. The reader glimpses the borderline manic-depressive interior life of the narrator in his descriptions of the Commander who seems to be an Orphic figure returning from the underworld and entering the narrator's room as a living presence: *"Au milieu de la nuit le Commandeur entra dans ma chambre : pendant l'après-midi, je passais devant son tombeau, l'orgueil m'avait poussé à l'inviter ironiquement. Son arrivée inattendue m'épouvanta"* (III 395). The narrator finds himself host to a guest from the underworld as he lies next to another victim who resembles a corpse. His monologue ends in a manic mode: *"un bonheur affirmé contre toute raison. . . . En mon coeur idiot, l'idiotie chante à gorge déployée. JE TRIOMPHE!"* (III 396). The full-throated triumph expressed in a kind of singing idiocy finishes Part One. Near the end of Part Two another sense of victory occurs. Troppmann experiences a triumph over his impotency, but his elation is transitory because soon thereafter, he has a vision of the future in which he foresees a murderous madness that is a mix of children, flame, and thunder in a stifling sulfur that fills his throat - *"qui prend à la gorge"* (III 487). The throat full of triumph at the end of Part One becomes a throat choked by terror by the end of the novel.

In one nightmare, Troppmann's obsession with death appears to grow out of a liminal experience that would lead him, like Orpheus, into regions of Hades in quest of a woman. He looks into a casket to find a pink wax figure that turns into marble and then into a cadaver with a head of a mare, a toothless jawbone or fishbone body, and no feet. Out of this grotesque monstrosity, he meets Minerva, goddess of war and sister to Bacchus, god of wine and wild behavior (the Dionysian theme is evident in this text as inebriation and concupiscence). Then Dirty appears out of the transformed and transforming cadaver, and he sees her as both the object of his desire and the personification of his worst fears as she takes the form of Don Juan's Commander. He says: "Je compris vite que, dans ce rêve, Dirty, devenue folle, en même temps morte, avait pris le vêtement et l'aspect de la statue du Commandeur . . . elle se précipitait sur moi pour m'anéantir" (III 420). Dirty, like death, is seductive and terrifying; his infatuation with both seems to be surpassed only by his fear of them.

Troppmann's inner torment is reflected in his outward behavior. A segment of the text entitled "Les pieds maternels," is a liminal labyrinth. The title is the most enigmatic of all the chapter or segment titles used in this novel. Since feet can represent genitals, he may be referring to the experience with his dead mother whose feet he mentions were "pieds nus" (III 434). Or perhaps he

regards all the women who try to "mother" him as phallic - his wife, her mother, Lazare, Xénie (all mentioned in this segment). Or he may be implying that the feminization of feet is a figure of his own impotence. It is likely that he sees his impotence as a reflection of a general ineffectiveness of intellectuals to change the world, "un monde voué au malheur" (III 412) because at one point in "Les pieds maternels," Troppmann wanders into the Café de Flore, a hub of philosophical debate, but he takes no part in the on-going discussion: "Les autres parlaient, avec le plus grand sérieux, de chaque chose qui était arrivée et dont il était utile d'être informé" (III 412). He sees no need to be informed; information is power, but it also invites response and decision. Troppmann rejects the notion of the utility of information, and his peripheral position in this group and in the other spaces he mentions occupying as he moves about the city are figurations of his liminality.

"Les pieds maternels" becomes a generalization of how liminality becomes a way of life for Troppmann. At its beginning, Troppmann speaks of his inebriation and debauchery: "Mon existence avait pris un cours de plus en plus déjeté. Je buvais des alcools ici ou là, je marchais sans but précis" (III 411). Troppmann habitually leaves his house, his room, or a café and takes to the streets, a liminal and ambiguous locality. "[I]f it is the privileged

site of collective action and mass manifestations, whether of the Right or Left, the street is also the site of private needs, curiosities, obsessions" (Suleiman, "Bataille" 27).

In a restaurant in Montparnasse, he sits "à la terrasse" and observes a bourgeois mother and son while "un chat venait de se jeter à la gorge d'un autre, au pied des arbustes qui formaient la bordure de terrasse" (III 412). The choice of words, "pied," "bordure," and "terrasse" underscores the fringe position of his perception. After leaving the restaurant, the circularity of his narration is illustrated in his aimless wandering that leads him unexpectedly back to his own street: "[J]'ai marché si longtemps que j'arrivai très loin, dans la rue où j'habite. . . . [A]u lieu d'entrer chez moi, je revins délibérément sur mes pas" (III 413). He is on a treadmill of uncertainty that takes him to the threshold of his own house, but he has no interest in the structured bourgeois life that home represents. He takes a taxi to the Tabarin where he insists on a table by the dance floor; he describes how he is seated:

[C]ette chaise était ainsi en porte à faux : j'avais le sentiment que, d'un instant à l'autre, je pouvais perdre l'équilibre et m'étaler au milieu des filles nues qui dansaient. . . . Dans cette ridicule situation, mon existence en équilibre instable sur une chaise devenait la personnification du malheur. (III 413)

This description of precarious balance and discomfort typifies his liminal position where existence is unstable and unhappy. He visits two more cafés, the Sphynx and the Dôme, before finally taking a taxi home. He learns that his wife has called from Brighton, and he realizes that had he earlier entered his door instead of returning to the streets, he would have been there for her call. "Il était plus de quatre heures du matin, mais, au lieu de me coucher et de dormir, je tapai un rapport à la machine, toutes portes ouvertes" (III 414). With all doors open and just before dawn, Troppmann sits down to write. The life of a writer does not fit easily into a bourgeois style of living, and he opens the doors to other possibilities.

In this text Troppmann repeatedly opens doors and windows or requests they be open: "A un moment donné, je suis allé à la fenêtre et je l'ai ouverte" (III 409); "J'allai vers la fenêtre ouverte" (III 452). Open doors and open windows allow for venting his fears (as in the Commander's visits) as well as for the inspiration that kindles his creativity; Troppmann's inspiration derives from openness. Another instance of his writing occurs as a result of what he hears through his open bedroom window. Enthralled by a neighbor woman's singing from Offenbach's La Vie Parisienne, his own creativity responds: "Écrivant aujourd'hui, une joie aiguë m'a porté le sang à la tête, si folle que j'aimerais chanter moi aussi" (III 431).

Through the open doors and windows of the text, the inside/outside opposition becomes equivocal. Troppmann prefers the open doors and open windows while he is in his house; he is inside, but he has a sense of and easy access to the outside. The novel begins "dans un bouge" and ends "dans un compartiment" of a train, but much of the rest of the time Troppmann is outside.

When he leaves Paris for Spain, the place of Don Juan and "le bleu du ciel," the full extent of his liminality is exposed in the out-of-doors, under the Spanish sun. "Le soleil était terrible, il faisait songer à une explosion. . . . Mes yeux ne se perdaient plus dans les étoiles qui luisaient au-dessus de moi réellement, mais dans le bleu du ciel de midi" (III, 455). Spain is a polyvalent land, the birthplace of the ever seductive Don Juan myth and the locus of death in the bullfights Bataille witnessed there.<sup>3</sup> This text was written in Spain, a country that is a "sort of internal transgression of the laws of European geography" (Hollier, Against 53). Mühlen writes about Spain in this era: "Spain was exceedingly complicated, contradictory, and impossible to measure by the political categories of other nations" (10). Spain is a country on

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<sup>3</sup>"On May 7, 1922, in Madrid . . . a famous torero, Granero, was killed by the bull." Bataille was present at the bullfight (Hollier, Against 167).

the edge of Europe, and Troppmann goes to Barcelona, a city on the edge of Spain.

Surya points out that "Troppmann quittera Paris pour Barcelone. . .comme touriste" (Surya 217). A tourist, like a hotel guest, is a model of liminality, crossing thresholds and borders, entering a place for a limited stay, being vulnerable to, but not a part of, societal structures and being subject to no long-term commitment. A tourist can feel almost childlike as Troppmann explains: "Au milieu de la rue, j'aurais voulu parler aux autres; j'étais perdu au milieu d'une foule aveugle. Je ne me sentais ni moins stupide, ni moins impuissant qu'un enfant en bas âge" (III 449). And despite his political history in Paris as a partisan Marxist, Troppmann takes only a sightseer's interest in the political events going on in Barcelona, a city that is on the verge of exploding into rebellion.

In the blue of the Barcelona sky, Troppmann goes to the beach, a place where water meets land in a fluid boundary. He takes off his clothes and swims, an activity in which the body suspends itself in fluid. This undeniably liminal place and the undeniably liminal activity awaken him to new possibilities. "Je cessai de nager et je regardai le ciel bleu." Now instead of thinking "j'allais mourir" (III 439) he begins to think in explicitly liminal language: "[J]'allais vivre. . . . Mais rien ne me semblait solide"



(III 464). He feels that his life is new born, "ma vie, cessant d'être malheureuse, était dans les langes une chose insignifiante" (III 464). The liquidity of this scene has connotations of birth, baptism, and rites of passage. This type of liberating experience occurs under the clear blue sky, in the barrier-free waters, off the coast of Spain.

The narratorial voice expresses the stifling monotony of indoor spaces that reflect the dullness of his interior life. He seems to live a fuller life and to experience a greater range of human emotions when he is outdoors than he does when he is inside. In Paris he constantly takes to the streets; in Barcelona, he goes to the beach. He explains: "Il y avait plus de fraîcheur au dehors que dans la chambre. Il fallait que je sorte" (III 452).

Dirty's arrival in Spain is by plane. Travel by air has a quality as liminal as that of swimming in the sea. It follows van Gennep's preliminal, liminal, postliminal pattern: the entrance into the plane separates one for a time of passage; the suspension above everything on earth and the temporary connection with other passengers is analogous to the liminal interval; then the return to earth and the rejoining of everyday life coincides with the postliminal (Pitt-Rivers 115-130).

The loose structure of this novel is figured in the action that moves from London to Barcelona to Germany and from land to sea to air. The narratorial voice relates

fleeting episodes filled with brief conversations using short sentences producing a perforated *récit*. The narration is chronological, but the incidents that occur often seem only slightly related to one another. Scant background is given for the various events, and most of the figures are only developed to the extent of Troppmann's personal admiration for or disdain of them. The novel is off balance with the first part consisting of one and a half pages and the second part more than eighty pages long. Bersani calls this a "spurting-motor structure" (111); the novel begins after a couple of false starts. However, I visualize the novel's structure more in terms of architecture: the introduction is the basement - after all, the first scene in the novel takes place in the "sous-sol" (III 385). The page and a half of part one is a cornerstone for the multi-roomed structure of part two that is divided into chapters that are divided into segments. Collier compares the structure of this novel to an envelope that cannot hold its contents: "Le récit apparaît ainsi comme une enveloppe maladroite, un espace inadéquat pour l'expérience: il doit tout le temps être *interrompu, commenté, complété* et de nouveau *esquivé*" (28).

The frequent references to images of regurgitation in the text signal the repetitive rejection of content that is symptomatic of undecidability in Bataille's writing. As

was the case in his writing W.-C., he has a tendency to suppress a part of what he writes. The original of Le Bleu du ciel no longer exists, and in the typed copy that was done for publication, the page numbers skip from seventeen to thirty-four with an inscription written by Bataille: "manquent 16 pages supprimées" (III 561). The reader who learns this bit of history regarding Le Bleu du ciel may tend to imagine what might have been contained in the suppressed pages; thereby, the text will never be complete and will always contain a secret. The narratorial voice does seem to want to tell all, but the problem is that the whole story simply can never be told. In a confessional tone appropriate for psychotherapy, Troppmann discloses his inner self leaving sentences and episodes unfinished. Ellipses frequently interrupt the narration and parts of conversations. Sometimes the ellipsis represents that which seems to Troppmann to be too hackneyed to be repeated as in M. Melou's discourse (III 425). Other ellipses replace what cannot be said because it is too shameful or too painful as seems to be the case with his confessions of necrophilia. Still other unfinished phrases simply leave the reader pensive, contemplating the meaning of the part unsaid, as with the final sentence of "Les pieds maternels" - "c'était une comédie..." (III 439). Comedy, like liminality, derives from the incongruent and often the transgressive. Laughter, like eroticism, can be

a strategy for living with the reality of death - experiencing release before the final letting go.

The feminine presence in this text resides in women filling rather stereotypical roles: wife, mother, mistress or lover. These do not necessarily present liminality since they are traditional representations. (Of course, it is possible to argue that any woman in a traditional role is already liminal.) One notable exception to women in predictable circumstances is Lazare who fits none of the categories that Troppmann associates with women. The liminality of the feminine presence (the kind that transgresses tradition), therefore, is found primarily in Lazare. However, beyond that, the liminality Troppmann experiences is sometimes instigated and at other times accentuated by Dirty and Xénie. The discussion of liminality and feminine presence in this novel, then, will be bipolar, with Lazare at one end as an example of a woman who is liminal to the traditional models of women at the time, and Troppmann at the other as the one whose liminality is enhanced by the feminine presence - keeping in mind that all the women in this *récit* are viewed through the lens of Troppmann.

Lazare is liminal, in part, because she is transgressive, and her transgressivity is one reason for Troppmann's fascination as well as his irritation with her. He has an almost clinical eye for describing women - how

they look to him and how they behave around him. He first points out that Lazare transgresses the standards for women's appearance and behavior. He complains: "C'était une fille de vingt-cinq ans, laide et visiblement sale (les femmes avec lesquelles je sortais auparavant étaient, au contraire, bien habillées et jolies)" (III 401). She is primarily the target of his contempt: "Lazare me répugnait physiquement. . ." (III 405). However, he is drawn to her at the same time: "Il était difficile d'expliquer l'intérêt que j'avais pour elle" (III 401). In fact, his intense attraction and strong aversion for the same person convolute in Troppmann to underscore his undecidability.

Transgressivity, for Lazare, includes a willingness to break the law. She goes to Barcelona to aid the workers in planning an insurrection. It is in this capacity that Lazare has a band of followers like Michel, a Frenchman in Barcelona, and Antonio, a young mechanic, who are both in orbit around her and seem ready to assist her in carrying through her project even though they do not understand the reasons behind her plan to attack a prison. Lazare's position as a leader of men puts her in a unique category in this study since neither Karin in *L'Autre* nor Djébar's narrator in *L'Amour, la fantasia* ever has any measurable authority over men. The fact that the men following Lazare do not understand her logic indicate that she is liminal even among her own followers.

Lazare's sympathy with workers and prisoners and her need to be on the side of the oppressed is the justification she gives Troppmann in their earlier conversation in her Paris apartment for her continued allegiance to communism. Troppmann's original association with Lazare was in leftist political circles in Paris, and his indifference to the revolt that Lazare and her followers are planning in Barcelona reveals a disillusionment on his part with the communist cause. Lazare seems to represent a feminized form of communism to him. In a dream that Troppmann has while he is in Barcelona, he sees the name Lenin written in feminine form: "Le nom de Lénine revenait souvent dans ces inscriptions tracées en noir. . . ce nom était étrangement altéré, il avait une forme féminine : *Lenova!*" (III 462). The building in which he sees these inscriptions explodes in his dream just after he has made a narrow escape. In my view Troppmann's impotence, his rejection of Lazare, and this dream of "Lenova" are connected to his disillusionment with the intellectual pursuits of leftist idealism. He sees it weakened by feminization - a linguistic strategy he uses to justify his non-participation. The explosion in his dream of a feminized form of politics is a graphic illustration of his deep-seated disdain for women.

Lazare meets with her co-conspirators in a spot called the Criolla in Barcelona, a transvestite bar, a site of

ambiguous gender where again feminization is problematic. Troppmann makes no explanation for his being in this establishment, but he is shocked to learn of Lazare's frequent visits there: "Je ne pouvais imaginer Lazare assise où j'étais, devant un spectacle scandaleux" (III 441). He indicates little tolerance for her projects on behalf of the politically oppressed in Barcelona. In a self-serving explanation, he simply clarifies his position as having moved from the middle to the margins: "Je comprenais qu'à Barcelone, j'étais en dehors de choses, alors qu'à Paris, j'étais au milieu" (III 466). It seems to be rather obvious that when a woman steps out of her traditional role and moves into politics, Troppmann moves out and abandons the project, disparaging it as feminine.

Lazare's liminality is accentuated by her spiritual qualities. In the same conversation in which Troppmann questions her affiliation with what he considers a lost political cause, he says that he suspects her of Christian leanings: "Je pensai : elle est chrétienne" (III 424); he seems to equate Christianity with feminized politics. It is curious that in spite of his contempt for her and for her convictions, he relies on her listening ear and confesses to her as to a priest: "Je racontai ma vie entière à cette vierge. . . . Je pensais que Lazare finirait par se mettre en colère, mais elle était devenue aussi calme qu'un curé écoutant une confession" (III 404,

407). To Antonio Lazare is already canonized: "À ses yeux Lazare était une sainte" (III 442). It is possible that Lazare baffles and frustrates Troppmann because he cannot control her; however, he also cannot dismiss her. She is rarely the focus of his full attention but seems to remain always in the conscious margins of his mind.

Liminality is implied in Lazare's name as a feminized form of Lazarus, one who died and came back from the dead. In Antonio's story told to Troppmann by Michel, Lazare dares Antonio to shoot her. After he holds the loaded revolver to her chest for several minutes as she stands calmly waiting, he loses his nerve. Lazare then asks for the gun and takes the bullet that would have killed her to keep as a souvenir of having lived past death. Michel, who witnesses the event, describes Lazare's behavior throughout the incident as "calme comme un mort" (III 443). His evaluation makes her into a kind of Orphic mystic. He considers her a sinister bird of misfortune: "C'était en même temps comique et sinistre, comme si j'avais un corbeau, un oiseau de malheur, un avaleur de déchets sur mon poignet. . . . Lazare envoûte ceux qui l'entendent. Elle leur semble hors de terre" (III 405, 442). She bewitches those around her because she has an almost supernatural quality or an aura of spirituality. Troppmann regards her as macabre and thinks her name is suitable: "Son nom de famille, Lazare, répondait mieux à son aspect



macabre que son prénom" (III 401). Lazare, whose first name is Louise, has in the ending of both her names the mute e, "a syllable that vanishes into the muteness of a silent vowel" (Hollier, Against 120), and as the récit moves toward its conclusion, Lazare vanishes from the text.

In contrast to Lazare, Dirty and Xénie make their presence felt in ways that could be considered more "traditionally transgressive" since both are romantically involved with Troppmann, a married man. Their names are also of interest in this study because instead of the mute e which is the usual French feminine ending, these characters have voiced syllables ending their names - transgressivity in these two women is pronounced. Although the narratorial voice is never a woman's voice, Hollier states that "Bataille, at least on the level of choosing his characters' names, demonstrates a particular predilection for voiced feminine endings. The feminine makes itself heard" (Against 120). The names Dirty and Xénie end in the sound of the letter *i* "a phallic letter written like a numeral of unity" (Hollier, Against 120). Moreover, Dirty's given name is actually Dorothea ending in the voiced letter a.

For Bataille, there are a certain number of significant usages of *a* that refer. . . to Latin, where it is the mark of the feminine, as opposed to the -us of many masculine endings. Latin here

performs less as a dead, classical language, than as a religious language. (Hollier, Against 119)

Whereas Lazare is liminal to the world of women in traditional roles, Dirty and Xénie are catalysts to Troppmann's entry into liminality because both provoke him to an erotic response. For Troppmann women become icons, and he frequently wishes to prostrate himself before them. About Dirty he says: "[J]'avais toujours envie de me jeter à ses pieds" (III 405); and with Xénie, he repeats: "[J]'aurais dû demander pitié, j'aurais dû me jeter à ses pieds" (III 433). By affecting him in erotic and quasi-religious ways, Dirty and Xénie facilitate his passage into liminality.

Troppmann has a wife and two children, but in this text his wife is merely the absent presence. The time that his wife spends abroad defers a decision on the status of their marriage; yet, her presence through letters and phone calls that punctuate the *récit* keeps her in the story and keeps their relationship undecided. She represents the conventionality from which Troppmann desires distance. Her mother acts as the surrogate woman of the house, and that both preserves the bourgeois respectability of the situation and subtly hints at the troubling incestuous desires about which he is sometimes obsessed.

Troppmann has no complaints about his wife: "Ma femme s'est dévouée pour moi. Elle se rendait folle pour moi

pendant que je la trompais" (403). Her name is Edith, pronounced in French like a feminized form of *édit*, implying a pronouncement of authority. When examined in the context of Troppmann's confession just quoted, it brings to mind the word *interdite*. Troppmann's interest was no longer in *Édith*, but in women, like Dirty and Xénie, who were *interdites*. Dirty and Xénie have very little in common with one another except that they both find themselves in Troppmann's universe.

Xénie neither disgusts Troppmann like Lazare, nor does she dumbfound him as does Dirty. She is the woman in between the extremes, but one to whom Troppmann is strongly attracted. She styles herself as avant-garde, but is really just an idle rich girl: "C'était simplement une fille désœuvrée et trop riche. Je vis devant son assiette une revue d'avant-garde" (III 415). Xénie appears in stark contrast to Dirty because she is compliant, even masochistic in her desire to please Troppmann. Her name comes from the Greek *xenos* which means foreigner, and she is foreign to Troppmann's ways. Derrida comments: "On ne s'attend pas l'événement de ce qui, de celui ou de celle qui vient, arrive et passe le seuil, l'immigrant, l'émigrant, l'hôte, l'étranger" ("Apories" 321). Hoping for, waiting on, expecting some erotic encounter, Troppmann becomes acquainted with a stranger, Xénie, in a taxi

drivers' restaurant where she just happens to be his dinner companion. She certainly does not expect what she receives from him - Troppmann moves his hand holding a fork under the table to first caress her leg, then to stab it with the tines: "A travers la robe, j'enfonçai brutalement les dents de la fourchette dans la cuisse. . . . [E]lle n'eut pas le temps de m'empêcher . . . d'avaler la petite quantité de sang que je venais de faire couler" (III 416). Later after Xénie comes to Barcelona at Troppmann's request, he is totally indifferent to her well-being and even sends her away amid gun fighting in the streets of the city. If women can be viewed (for the purposes of this reading) in the context of religious association, Lazare might be the priest, and Dirty the goddess, but Xénie seems to be the sacrifice.

Dirty inspires awe in Troppmann: "Dirty est le seul être au monde qui m'ait jamais contraint à l'admiration" (III 406). Troppmann seems to regard Dirty as a subterranean goddess, as a kind of Eurydice leading him to an Orphic experience of the underworld. At the beginning and near the end of the novel, Dirty is underground and on the ground respectively. The figure of Dirty is associated with the sacred and the transgressive, and the two concepts mesh in the effect she has on Troppmann. Bataille writes on the connection between sexual and mystical experiences in L'Érotisme:

Tout ceci mène à dire, en dernier, qu'une fois saisi dans ses diverses formes le thème constant de la sexualité, rien n'empêche plus d'en apercevoir la relation avec celui de l'expérience des mystiques. . . enfin de l'ouverture à ce mouvement immédiat de la vie qui est d'habitude comprimé qui se libère soudain dans le débordement d'une joie d'être infinie. (272)

Troppmann repeatedly tries to explain to himself the strange power Dirty wields over him: "Pourtant elle me donnait un sentiment de pureté" (III 387), but when he is with Dirty, he says "Je me sentais impuissant et avili" (III 391). Dirty arrives ill in Barcelona, and Troppmann immediately takes her to the hotel where they share an asexual moment of intimacy: "Je ne l'avais pas effleuré de mes lèvres, elle m'avait à peine regardé, mais ce qui arrivait dans la chambre nous unissait" (III 471). This gentleness reveals a crack in the facade of Troppmann's transgressivity. His feeling for Dirty involves much more than simple gratification.

The climax of their experience together takes place finally with Dirty in the dirt in the liminal space above a cemetery on a hillside near a town in Germany; it is the first of November. Victor Turner writes: "All Souls' Day. . . commemorates the souls in purgatory, emphasizing at once their lower hierarchical position to the souls in heaven" (Ritual 182). Troppmann is here again an Orphic figure making his way into the empire of death. He feels most aroused when he is in the presence of death possibly

because when faced with its immedicacy and inevitability, he is invigorated, and momentarily his sense of impotence and aporia is lessened. Their union on the hillside above the graveyard is poignant. In relating the story of this day, Troppmann calls Dirty by her given name, Dorothea, God's gift.

Troppmann and Dorothea are actually lost when they find themselves in a freshly plowed field above the cemetery, and they look down at the cemetery with lights on the graves that blend into the stars and the lights from the town below. They feel they are engulfed in a starry abyss - "cet abîme d'étoiles funèbres" (III 481). Relishing the starlit gloom and freshly-turned earth, they are able to surrender themselves to an experience of intimacy:

Dans l'ombre, il arrivait que nous nous cherchions  
 . . . . Nous étions liés l'un à l'autre . . . je  
 dégrafai Dorothea, je souillai son linge et sa  
 poitrine de la terre fraîche . . . Nous nous  
 abandonnions de temps à autre. (III 481)

It is a time of triumph for Troppmann, a liminal moment *par excellence*. In the abandonment of the moment, Dorothea and Troppmann slide: "nous avons glissé sur un sol en pente. . . . Si je n'avais, d'un coup de pied, arrêté ce glissement, nous serions tombés dans la nuit" (III 482). Liminality is prolonged, and the fall into the abyss is avoided when Troppmann breaks their fall by bracing his foot against the protrusion of a rock. The phallic satisfaction this scene portrays is stunning!

The moment of *jouissance* between two lovers reflects a sacred moment as two separate beings transcend bodily limits to unite physically and spiritually. Both are able to experience their own joy and participate in the pleasure of the other in a freedom that temporarily suspends the individual's limits. Bataille writes: "[I]l semble à l'amant que seul l'être aimé peut en ce monde réaliser ce qu'interdisent nos limites, la pleine confusion de deux êtres, la continuité de deux êtres discontinus" (L'Erotisme 27). *Jouissance* gives an instantaneous and momentary sense of completion to the fragmented psyches of everyday life. The sense of contentment and well-being that can follow such an experience has potential for enhancing life beyond the borders of those involved in the particular experience. Besnier explains how the joy of lovers can renovate the social structure around them: "In short, the strength of lovers. . . is certainly not a question of achieving power, but of keeping as close as possible to the emotion which fills the individual and then overflows into society in its first moments" (Besnier, "Bataille" 24).

In the incident just described Troppmann and Dorothea find *liminality* with one another in the sense that they are in a liminal place and time where they are fused first in their eyes, then in their spirits, and finally with their bodies. Nancy says: "Pour Bataille, la communauté fut avant tout et pour finir celle des amants" (Communauté 89).

Troppmann and Dirty capture as lovers the essence of a kind of communion that is available in liminality. In L'Expérience intérieure Bataille's analogy for this kind of experience is contagion. "Ce sont des contagions d'énergie, de mouvement, de chaleur ou des transferts d'éléments. . . comme un courant ou comme une sorte de ruissellement électrique" (V 111). But the charged moment is not sustainable: "Ainsi, où tu voudrais saisir ta substance intemporelle, tu ne rencontres qu'un glissement, que les jeux mal coordonnés de tes éléments périssables" (V 111). The slipping of the two lovers on the hillside is indicative of the transience, the slippery slide of any union between two people.

Troppmann comments on the remaining hours that he and Dirty have: "Les dernières passèrent rapidement. A Francfort je voulais aller dans une chambre. Elle refusa" (III 485). Dirty's emphatic manner contrasts starkly with Troppmann's. At the railway station he finds the wait for her train intolerable, but he says: "Je n'eus pas le courage de m'en aller" (III 485). In fact, in spite of the fact that Troppmann is the narrator, Dirty's words frame the *récit* since the first and last words spoken in the text are hers. "Qu'y a-t-il?" she asks at the beginning as she sobs in a drunken fit in the London dive. And at the end after the experience in the cemetery and just before they take leave of one another, Troppmann asks her why she is



crying. She answers: "Pour rien" (III 385, 485). For one who is involved with liminal people in a liminal period of history, it may appear that nothing is happening. However, in retrospect, one can often look back and see that a great deal was going on. The aporia that seemed to be "for nothing" is the liminality where serious change is in process.

Troppmann's prescience sees those changes as they will play out in the future. He is at the train station in Frankfurt and notices at the other extreme of the square - "de loin, à l'autre extrémité d'une place immense" - the signs of what was soon to move from the extremity into the mainstream of the town squares of much of Europe: "un parade de musiciens en uniforme. . . . J'étais devant des enfants en ordre militaire" (III 486). While watching this band of German youth playing military music in the square, Troppmann has an apocalyptic vision of a conflagration in which all of humanity will be joined in a kind of liminality. He sees the band of youth as soldiers: "[U]n jour ils s'avanceraient, riant au soleil : ils laisseraient derrière eux les agonisants et les morts" (III 487). The grim scene jolts him severely. "Une hilarité me tournait la tête : j'avais à me découvrir en face de cette catastrophe une ironie noire, celle qui accompagne les spasmes dans les moments où personne ne peut se tenir de crier" (III 487).

Despite this jarring vision, Troppmann is not shaken out of his aporetic condition. The impotence that has plagued him throughout the novel plagues all of Europe and will climax in a realization of his vision of apocalypse. He wanders through the square watching the rain and listening to the Nazi youth band. After the music and the rain stop, he returns to the station and walks back and forth along the *quai* several times. Troppmann's undecided behavior, seemingly a symptom of his liminality, is in stark contrast to the highly structured German state exemplified by the youth in their military uniforms and by the train which, when he steps aboard, wastes no time in leaving: "Je marchai quelque temps, le long du quai, avant d'entrer dans un compartiment; le train ne tarda pas à partir" (III 487). At the end of the novel, his status as a passenger on a train underscores his seemingly unalterable liminal situation.

Le Bleu du ciel is an example of transgressive literature and the liminal effects it produces. Bataille's authority as a writer of fiction is put in question by his transgressive writing that includes the use of scatology and eroticism. There is a philosophical notion of undecidability in his novels and a "headless" philosophy that focuses on the body and on the bodily functions of elimination and orgasm as a means of attack on the rational

foundations of Western philosophy. The narratorial voice is Troppmann's inner voice that discloses his attraction to the liminality of death via erotic activity because eroticism gives entrance into the liminal space between life and death. The Orphic themes draw out Troppmann's infatuation with death.

Troppmann's interior life is a struggle against suffocation, and that may explain his love of outdoor places. His inner torment is reflected in his outer behavior which is labyrinthine and indecisive. The novel's loose structure is reflective of its porous content. The feminine presence permeates the text since every major figure with the exception of the narrator is a woman. Liminality is evident within the figure of Lazare and in the effect that women have on Troppmann. In the final scene all the women have left him. Although he is alone and on his way back to Paris, there is no indication that he will become anything other than the errant Don Juan that he has been.

In Le Bleu du ciel liminality is evident in the protagonists' transgressive behaviors and desires that emanate from the erotic. In this text the search for sacred meaning, the focus of the discussion of L'Autre, and *communitas*, the theme of L'Amour, la fantasia, are also derived from the erotic. The close relationship of the

erotic and the sacred put Bataille and Green in touch as will be discussed in the next chapter.

### CHAPTER III: SEARCH FOR SACRED MEANING: JULIEN GREEN'S L'AUTRE

The communication of mystical knowledge or *gnosis* in a search for sacred meaning is integral to the liminal experience. Turner considers "the communication of the *sacra*" to be "the heart of liminal matter" (Forest 102). His and others' sociological studies of rites of passage reveal the significance of this element. He states: "The liminal phase is the essential, antiseccular component in true ritual, whether it be labeled 'religious' or 'magical'" ("Social Dramas" 157). A time which seems to be a suspension of time, liminality can be a period of self-reflection and spiritual exploration.

In initiation rites and in the various ceremonies surrounding birth, marriage, and death, the liminal period is a parenthesis of time when former routines are abandoned and new patterns of behavior are prescribed. The change in the status or role is accompanied by liminal experiences. As was explained in the last chapter, liminality also occurs within those who have violated social norms or have departed in some way from exigencies of normality, transgressing the structures maintained by societal expectations. In modern societies, a recognizable counterpart to the liminal experience of the initiate is that of the traveler who leaves home to spend some time in

another country. Van Gennep explains: "A man at home, in his tribe, lives in the secular realm; he moves into the realm of the sacred when he goes on a journey and finds himself a foreigner near a camp of strangers" (12). As has been stated, the protagonists in all three of the novels being considered here are, at some point, strangers to their surrounding cultures, and in that capacity, they all undergo something of a spiritual crisis. In L'Autre by Julien Green the spiritual search is explicit and becomes the central theme of the novel. Its religious content is the reason for including L'Autre in this study of liminality.

First impressions would seem to classify L'Autre as the "other" to Le Bleu du ciel as Green's fiction differs radically from that of Bataille, but I wish to point out some underlying commonalities. In addition to the narrators' creating for themselves, in both of these texts, a liminal existence in a foreign society, they are also preoccupied with sexual desire and haunted by metaphysical concerns. Troppmann, Roger, and Karin are all very much consumed with their own spiritual and sexual frustrations. Troppmann's devotion to Dirty is a search for meaning in the context of death. His impotence is spiritual as well as sexual. The protagonists in L'Autre are much younger

and seem more naïve than Troppmann. Theirs seems to be a sexual relationship that was virginal, uncomplicated, and mutually gratifying. Karin is unusual among Green's protagonists because she lives very much in her body, and her religious inquiry never leads her to implicate her body as evil. In L'Autre sexuality is not the primary issue; the question of religion conflicts the plot.

Late twentieth-century criticism is intrigued, it seems, with the pursuit of meaning in the face of death. The Christian experience of religious searching may seem out of step with the kind of search for the sacred that is available in works like Bataille's L'Érotisme or L'Expérience intérieure. If this is so, then L'Autre is liminal to the direction of intellectual interest in the subject of the sacred at the present time. Anguish over death is not a strong motif in it because implicit in the religious belief underlying this text is resurrection. Fiction, of course, allows for that; the text's figures await resurrection with every reader (See Gregg 41-45).

Green and Bataille both wrote fiction in which the spirit-flesh duality obsessed the protagonists. This kind of two-sided fixation indicates some Manichean tendencies in the profane-sacred opposition of both Green and Bataille. Both see dualistic forces at work in the world

and are beset by a profound loathing of the flesh, as commentators on both of their works have noted. Annette Tamuly describes Green: "D'aucuns ont évoqué le substantialisme greenien, son essentialisme fondé sur une sorte de manichéisme" (25); and Denis Hollier states: "Bataille never failed to acknowledge the seduction dualist thought and its often heterodox expressions exercised over him," ("Dualist" 126). Surya claims that Bataille has an undeniable disdain for the flesh: "[J]amais il n'aima la chair, jamais au sens du moins qu'il pût se la représenter sans répugnance" (43).

It is interesting that both Bataille and Green manifest an abhorrence of the body and that they both, when they were young, considered becoming priests. Bataille, in his youth, became a Christian believer and considered, for a brief period, entering the priesthood, but soon thereafter he left the Church permanently (Surya 464-470). Green, on the other hand, was reared as a Protestant, converted to Catholicism, considered the priesthood, then renounced his faith for a period of time only to return to it later (Stokes 3-15). That both of them once seriously considered taking the vows of celibacy suggests that they adopted, at least temporarily, the position of the Catholic Church regarding sexuality.



The Church has long viewed sexuality with great suspicion - almost as a necessary evil. It seems to me that this has contributed to the insidious tendency of the Christian West to both abhor and adore the human body. The sense of interdiction produces the erotic stimulation as Bataille explains in L'Érotisme: "L'humanité, significative de l'interdit, est transgressée dans l'érotisme" (161).

In my opinion the Christian religion which celebrates the incarnation of God is fundamentally an affirmation and not an abrogation of the flesh. Grosz cites Irigaray as having a similar assumption: "If Christianity makes explicit the fact that 'spiritual becoming' and 'corporeal becoming' are one and the same thing, Christianity must, in fact, be seen as a form of the cultivation and not at all as a renunciation of the sexual" ("Irigaray" 204). Some Christian writers have spoken on behalf of this concern. Sherrard in Christianity and Eros says: "The energy which manifests itself as the sexual energy . . . is the source and generator of all human creativeness. . . . It is the energy of life itself, divine in its origin and sacred in its nature" (76); and James Nelson in Embodiment argues the point this way: "The Body of Christ is thus antithetical to any spiritual dualism. It is not a community of

discarnate spirits but of body-selves bound to each other in and through their incarnate Lord" (259). Nelson contends that the alienation of the body from the spirit derives from sexist dualism which requires the subordination of women (46). Margaret Miles asks: "Why did 'the flesh' become marginalized in Christianity?" (185). She hypothesizes that "the sexism of Christian societies . . . created this view and fatally undermined the Christian project of integrating the flesh" (185). This attitude of body loathing is preserved and enhanced by an institutionalized sexism incorporated early on into the patriarchal church. Mary Douglas gives some background on this by contrasting the Christian and Jewish concepts regarding purity. She notes that for the earliest Christians, food and bodily conditions did not affect their spiritual status. "But continually the spiritual conditions of the early Church were frustrated by spontaneous resistance to the idea that bodily states were irrelevant to ritual" (Douglas 60). Douglas explains the gradual pronouncement of decrees regarding women's participation in worship and the consequential debasement of women. To give just one example, the Penitential of Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury at the end of the seventh century required that women undergo purgation for forty

days after childbirth and forbade them to enter a church during menstruation (Douglas 61). The pattern of subjugation of women begun in the early Middle Ages is now being contested by feminist theologians, but their efforts to reverse the pattern continue to meet the strongest kind of opposition.

The spirit-flesh conflict finds its way into all of Green's fiction, a fact noted by his commentators. Burne interprets the dualism as one of faith versus literature: "So Green is both a man of faith and a man of letters. . . . He is a man of two views, a Janus face, with the believer on one side and the novelist on the other, and they rarely communicate, if at all" (28). Referring to L'Autre, Dunaway elaborates on the dichotomy in Green:

In his most recent works we find the basic duality of spirit and eros in its most finished form. . . . [I]n L'Autre the polarity is expressed in still another *dédoublement*. There are two main characters, each of whom has his own narrative. . . . [T]here is a dual movement of spiritual and erotic forces represented by the two main characters. Significantly, a great deal of this novel is devoted not to narrative but to dialogue between Karin and Roger, constant debates between spirit and flesh. (97)

Michèle Matuschka in "L'Autre ou le conflit des deux réalités," states that the flesh-spirit conflict is presented here in a series of binary oppositions that can be reduced to "le péché et la foi" (239). The persistent

and inexhaustible capacity of grace is amplified in L'Autre more than in any previous work of Green. According to Matuschka, the death of Karin at the end has the double meaning of expiation and of grace.

Other observations on this novel concern the interpretation of the title, themes of liquidity and silence that contribute to the spiritual content, and some comment upon the manner in which this work of fiction is a departure for Green in some ways.

In Julien Green: The Great Themes Wildgen notices that water is one of the principal elements in L'Autre, and that it "is associated with peace, tranquility and affection" (118). She states that Karin's falling into water "is a physical manifestation of the body's submersion in the life of the soul, an event towards which everything in the novel tends" (119). In "Narrative Cure and the Silence of the Other in Julien Green's L'Autre," Ziegler discusses the ambiguity of the novel's title: "A cursory reading of the novel discloses the changeable sense of the term, its application in the course of the story to various entities the characters mention" (41). The term "l'Autre" is applied to a variety of figures ranging from a Danish soldier to Jesus. In Ziegler's reading the term "l'Autre" best applies to the reader. Both Roger and Karin narrate

their stories into a silence and assume that an uncritical "other" is listening in the person of the reader. Consequently, silence functions in L'Autre as it does in psychoanalysis; it becomes a medium of healing as the patient puts lived experience into language that is heard by a non-interventionist listener. Tamuly insists that "la beauté de la prose greenienne ne tient pas à sa plénitude, mais à ses brèches, ses trouées vers l'inexprimable, l'innommable, le silencieux" (124). She suggests that the "other" is never more present than in his or her absence. "Roger et Karin ne seront jamais plus proches l'un de l'autre que quand Roger se soustrait à l'attachement de la jeune femme pour lui permettre de rencontrer l'Autre" (263).

Michèle Raclot notes Karin is unusual among Green's protagonists because she is both artist and writer. Karin and Roger are, however, typical Greenian figures because they are both essentially escapists: "Il est vrai que les personnages de Green sont des êtres de fuite, mais leur fuite est presque toujours vaine" (Raclot 370). Anthony Newbury notes other aspects of L'Autre that are a departure:

Green leaves his original Anglo-Saxon world and his adopted France for Denmark and the city of Copenhagen. . . . One can easily read a two-fold symbolic value in the choice: this is the country

of sexual freedom and enjoyment par excellence,  
 but it is also the homeland of Soren Kierkegaard,  
 . . . [the] Northern Pascal. (162-163)

Newbury also notices that this is the first of Green's texts in which the "central human relationship explored is that of the heterosexual couple, a relationship involving a physical love that is both consummated and reciprocated -- a rare feature in Green's fiction -- albeit briefly in time" (161-162).

In my reading of L'Autre, I will again look at the writer's authority, the narratorial voices, and the feminine presence. The authority of this writer is threatened because of his cultural background and his choice of subject matter. The narratorial voices are liminal because they express feelings of exile, ostracism, and religious searching. Pluralizing the narratorial voice decenters the text and allows for more than one point of view. Since one segment of the text is narrated by a woman, the feminine presence grows stronger in this novel, and Karin is given the more dynamic role in the religious search. In addition, she discloses at the end that she is writing a novel.

Julien Green's authority as a writer is problematic in part because of the undecided nature of his cultural allegiance. This is aggravated in Green by what appears to

be a certain ambiguity on his part. He is both American and Parisian by birth, but seems to be always American in Paris, and Parisian in American contexts. As mentioned in chapter one, he gave his American citizenship as his reason for resigning from the *Académie Française*, but in the announcement of his recent death (on August 19, 1998), he is quoted as comparing "writing in English to 'wearing clothes that were not made for me'" ("Milestones," *Time* 22). Perhaps his ambivalence is explained by his upbringing in Paris as Petit discusses: "Il remonte à son enfance de petit Américain, qui tout Parisien qu'il se sentît, ne fut jamais tout à fait adapté aux milieux dans lesquels il vivait" (32).

He is liminal as a writer partly because of his ancestry and partly because of his choice of subject matter which ranges from a kind of magical realism in his early works to a fictionalized account of Christian conversion in *L'Autre*. He is also marginal to the category that could be called "Catholic Novelists," a group that includes Mauriac, Bernanos, Greene, O'Connor, and Percy. Green intentionally keeps his distance from this label; "he reiterates that to be known as a 'Catholic novelist' is a 'dreadful thing' to him" (Burne 27). His independence and aloofness can be

easily interpreted as arrogance, a factor which, I suspect, further marginalizes him in literary circles.

Religious experience has liminal elements, and writing about it develops these. Much writing on religion is propositional, such as sermons, essays, and explications of scriptural texts. When written into a novel, religion can seem shallow, contrived, or manipulative. In the age of science, religion has become suspect in academic circles, and religious fiction has been relegated to the province of Christian bookstores and church libraries. Writing a novel on the experience of finding faith is complicated because, in the modern age, positive religious experience does not often qualify as a subject for artistic endeavor. Robert de Saint John explains the difficulty of Green's project: "Décrire la sainteté doit être particulièrement difficile et c'est un fait qu'on ne cite aucun saint qui ait publié un roman" (542). The novelist and the saint, however, do both inhabit a space in which life's most critical questions are examined. Green was interested in the close relationship that mysticism has with sensuality. "[H]e was very impressed by a passage from Saint John of the Cross which affirms that when human nature aspires toward God, there is simultaneously a kind of rising tide of carnal desire" (Stokes 110). Herein lies the strong resemblance



to Bataille whose writing, especially L'Érotisme, is an attempt to grapple with this matter. Bataille says in the Forward to that text: "La sainte se détourne avec effroi du voluptueux: elle ignore l'unité des passions inavouable de ce dernier et des siennes propres" (11). Dunaway regards Green as a mystic and a sensualist, but he insists that a metamorphosis occurs and a third "artist" self is born out of the tension between the sensual and the spiritual (91).

The narratorial voice in this novel is shared among Roger, Karin, and two anonymous narrators. It is in the third narratorial voice, that of Karin in her *récit*, that the topic of religious experience is most discussed. The personal nature of religious experience requires of the reader of L'Autre a measure of tolerance and flexibility not unlike the indulgence one must grant to scatology and necrophilia in reading Le Bleu du ciel.

The voice that opens the text is that of a bystander who is reporting on the recovery of Karin's body from the dark, smelly waters of Copenhagen's harbor. Tamuly points to the philosophical dimensions of the fact that the novel ends before it begins: "La circularité spatiale du roman greenien correspond très exactement à sa circularité temporelle. Ici et là, la mort est au centre et avec elle, l'abolition de tout espace et de tout temps" (221); she

refers to Roger's comment in the middle of his *récit*: "Au centre de la vie, il y avait cette impitoyable mécanique que rien ne pouvait fausser. Il fallait mourir" (L'Autre 77). Death, being the inevitable and universal limit, gives perspective to all other limits, and these other limits (or borders and thresholds) that one encounters in the middle of life are a constant reminder of the certainty of death so that life constantly circles around death just as the *récit* circles around and back to the death of Karin.

In the beginning (as in the end), it is April, the month when nature comes back from the dead. The sun is pushing out "ce qui restait de l'interminable hiver scandinave" (L'Autre 9). The contrasts are vivid: the welcoming sunshine is juxtaposed with the black sea; the crowd of fifteen or twenty people includes the grieving few (Marie, Émil, and Ib) and the indifferent or hostile others who remember Karin as "l'Allemande. . . vue assez souvent passer dans les limousines des nazis" (L'Autre 10). But as the text opens, there is general agreement on one point: "Il y avait malgré tout du bonheur dans l'air, ce matin-là. Tout le monde était d'accord sur ce point" (L'Autre 9). This opening statement sets an ironic tone by describing a general happiness in the air, and this happiness creates a distraction and a safe distance from the dead woman. This

can be interpreted as a sense of general relief pervading the scene because Karin, an unprincipled individual, seems to have finally received what she deserves. Or the reason for a general sense of happiness can be read as a cryptic comment on death as merely a season, like winter, that serves as the basis from which life may have a new beginning.

The two named narrators, Roger and Karin, each present their *récits* from the position of "l'autre." Roger is considered the "other" since he is a foreigner in Copenhagen during his narration, and Karin, in her *récit*, is the ostracized "other" known by her community as "l'Allemande." I will call attention to the liminal qualities of each and, from my perspective, comment on the religious content in each *récit*.

In discussing Roger's *récit*, I will first comment on Roger as a "threshold person," a prime example of liminality. I will discuss the relationships he, as a newcomer and a foreigner, forms within the pages of his story. He is new in Copenhagen, new in a relationship to Karin, and new to Mlle. Ott's group. Finally, in terms of the theme of this chapter, I will discuss how the narratorial voice that is Roger's resists religion. His is

a secular or profane narration that sets up a disconsolate, agnostic tone preparatory to his later conversion.

Turner uses the expression "threshold people" to describe those who are "betwixt and between" (Ritual 95). Roger is undeniably a threshold figure. He arrives in the harbor city of Copenhagen as a twenty-four-year-old student tourist sponsored by his parents (L'Autre 39). In other words, he is still on the threshold of adulthood, no longer living with his family of origin, but not yet independent of his parents. He is seeking both personal adventure and a safe refuge from the approaching war storm in France: "[I]l y avait cette ombre sur la France" (L'Autre 53). Caws explains that whereas the word *limen* means "threshold" in Latin, in Greek it has the possible meanings of "refuge or harbor" (Eye 15). In this text both meanings are operative since threshold and refuge are held in tension by Roger's situation. In L'Autre Roger frequently is literally on the threshold. He says: "Malgré tout, je poussai la porte et demeurai sur le seuil, saisi d'étonnement" (L'Autre 81).

While Roger has come to Copenhagen to find both adventure and refuge, he is subjecting himself to all the possible perils of entering an unknown situation. Derrida

discusses how the "nouvel arrivant" disturbs the status quo:

Qu'est-ce que l'arrivant qui fait arriver un événement? . . . On ne se s'attend pas à l'événement de ce qui, de celui ou de celle qui vient, arrive et passe le seuil, l'immigrant, l'émigrant, l'hôte, l'étranger. . . . Tel arrivant affecte jusqu'à l'expérience du seuil dont il fait ainsi apparaître la possibilité avant même qu'on sache s'il y a eu invitation, appel, nomination, promesse. (Apories 321)

Roger is going to effect change in the process of being changed within this environment that is strange to him and to which he is a stranger. As a foreigner newly arrived in the city, Roger is looking for human contact. Having crossed national borders, he is now open to traversing other borders as well.

From the first sentence of his narration, he repeatedly uses the imperfect tense (indicating the on-going sense of his liminal condition): "J'attendais depuis si longtemps que je finissais par ne plus savoir ce que je faisais là, au coin de cette rue déserte, à huit heures du soir" (L'Autre 19). His liminality can be visualized in the manner in which he positions himself at the corner of a deserted street at dusk waiting for a rendez-vous. The street is a distinctly liminal place in this text, as it was in Le Bleu du ciel.

The category 'street' indicates the world with its unpredictable events, its actions and passions. .

. . . The street implies movement, novelty, and action. . . . In the street, relationships are those of patronage and have an indelible character of choice, or imply the possibility of choice. (Da Matta 209)

It is a highly ambiguous locale where Roger feels overwhelmed by the discomforts, the loneliness, and the assault on his senses of everything foreign. Most disconcerting is his inability to understand anything spoken around him - "le bruit de paroles incompréhensibles" (L'Autre 24). Language can have a disruptive capacity, and for Roger the language around him appears as an invisible force of alienation.

In the same discussion of "l'arrivant" cited above, Derrida dissects the experience of waiting for another in which one both waits and expects, "là où l'on s'attend l'un l'autre en sachant *a priori*, de façon absolument indéniable, que, la vie étant toujours trop courte, l'un y attend l'autre, car l'un et l'autre n'y arrivent jamais ensemble, à ce rendez-vous" (Apories 333). The experience of waiting conjures up suspicions that time is wasting because waiting puts every other activity in suspension. But the possibility that the waiting will be well rewarded keeps the suspense hopeful, and waiting at a corner keeps other possibilities open.

When Karin, still anonymous in the text and an almost total stranger to Roger, arrives hours late for their rendez-vous, he is disgusted and wonders why, with so many beautiful people in this city, he has waited so long for her. But doubt dissipates when she greets him with a smile: "Je me retournai et me trouvai devant un sourire. Je compris alors que c'était à cause de ce sourire que j'avais attendu" (L'Autre 20). In their text, Gaze and Mutual Gaze, Argyle and Cook discuss the ritual of a greeting using van Gennep's tripartite schema:

The precise form of greetings varies between different societies, but it always follows a common pattern, which can be correlated with Van Gennep's . . . three states of rituals: separation, transition and incorporation. At the climax of the greeting, the transitional phase, there is usually bodily contact and mutual gaze. (111)

The bodily contact, in this instance, is initiated by Karin - "une main se posa derrière moi sur mon coude avec une douceur qui m'empêcha de tressaillir" (L'Autre 20). The space around a human body serves as a kind of threshold, the crossing of which can be interpreted either as a violation or as an invitation.

When Roger first arrives in Copenhagen, he brings with him a letter of introduction to be presented to Mlle. Ott, a French-speaking proprietor of a bookstore. Roger makes a tentative first visit to Mlle Ott's: "Enfin je franchis le

seuil de cette librairie qui regardait un joli square ombragé" (L'Autre 41). Mlle. Ott opens the door to him literally and figuratively. She introduces him to Mr. Gore, an Englishman, whom Roger immediately dislikes: "La haine a ses coups de foudre comme l'amour" (L'Autre 79). "Court, épais, vêtu d'alpaga bleu marine, il demeurerait immobile" (L'Autre 80); Gore is the epitome of the "homme d'affaires en voyage," a model of the successful foreigner, one who retains his foreign status and is, thereby, a trophy for the local hostess. Roger calls him "le magicien de la spéculation" (L'Autre 80). In a sociological analogy, Roger is here a potential initiate into the structure of this "tribe," the segment of society gathered at this bookstore where Mlle. Ott is the "entremetteuse," and Mr. Gore is the sorcerer. Gore patronizes him saying: "Vous êtes jeune, il vous manque le savoir-faire" (L'Autre 81). Roger rebukes Gore's seemingly friendly gesture saying: "La vieillesse luxurieuse me fait horreur" (L'Autre 81). Roger's snub of Gore's bid to be his personal guru results in Roger's exclusion from Mlle. Ott's; he soon finds himself "dans le couloir, puis sur le palier, enfin dans la rue" (L'Autre 84). Roger could have become a participating member in Mlle. Ott's social club and, thereby, have lessened his sense of liminality, but he



makes a deliberate choice to avoid the status of belonging, and he will continue to make that choice throughout the text.

Roger's voice never gives overt credence to a spiritual search; in fact, he denigrates religion and tells Karin that he is an atheist (L'Autre 171). However, running through Roger's *récit* is a discourse of loneliness and self-doubt: "Seul. Je commençai à explorer les abîmes qu'il y a dans ce mot" (162); "Je me croyais brave, je ne l'étais pas. En vain je m'étais protégé contre la réalité du jour en refusant de lire la presse française qui arrivait ici chaque matin" (164); "J'errais comme un fantôme, ne remarquant rien, ne personne. Parfois je me laissais tomber sur un banc ou j'entrais dans un café. Le temps s'écoulait je ne sais comment" (166).

For Roger the antidote to loneliness is sex: "Pour moi, en ces années lointaines, il me paraissait impossible d'admettre aucune distinction entre le bien et le mal lorsqu'il s'agissait de la chair" (51). In an effort to escape the worsening news of the coming war, Roger takes Karin out of the city to a place and a time far removed from twentieth-century woes: "Je l'emmenais loin de la ville et nous allions cacher notre passion inquiète dans des villages . . . qui semblaient même n'être plus de notre siècle" (L'Autre 176). Traveling back into a simpler,

thatched-roof time, they experience a liminal retreat.

Roger speaks of "la joie de notre chair sans cesse inassouvie" (L'Autre 176). These are the last days of their time together, and everything in the time and place suggests liminality. Wildgen summarizes the event:

"Because of the season, the night will not fall - and they will spend the evening in ceaseless twilight. . . . The moment will thus be between the innocence of midday and the sensual *griserie* of darkness" (Wildgen 118). Later while remembering the experience, Roger says: "Les journées qui suivirent passèrent comme un rêve délicieux au centre d'un cauchemar. . . . [N]ous étions, Karin et moi, un refuge l'un pour l'autre" (L'Autre 175). Roger and Karin experience the lover's *communitas*, and this scene calls to mind Troppmann and Dirty on the German hillside.

Of the two protagonists, Karin is the more complex, and therefore, the more interesting because while she has a powerful sensuality and a strong sexual appetite, she is also capable of maintaining an ironic distance in her *récit* that shields her from the shame that others try to impose on her. In discussing the narratorial voice in Karin's part, I will first mention the foreign status that has been assigned to Karin in her own city, and I will discuss the liminality this creates for her. Her writing is a strategy

for coping with the alienation and is the raw material for a novel. Finally, I will discuss how her narratorial voice gives expression to her religious search.

The novel's structure is a flashback and a frame. In a ten-year lapse between the *récit* of Roger and that of Karin, an event takes place that puts the entire world on the threshold of annihilation. Whereas the setting of Le Bleu du ciel is presented as a prelude to the Second World War, L'Autre is a frame around it.

When Karin's *récit* begins ten years after Roger's, she has become ostracized, known as "l'Allemande" because she was a mistress to the German officers during their occupation of Copenhagen. Consequently, she is now an untouchable: "Comme dans un rêve, j'ai marché dans les rues pleines de monde. On s'écartait sur mon passage, personne ne me touchait" (184). Karin's only human relationship is a purely perfunctory one related to the necessary communication with her employer regarding her work as a commercial artist. She has become a ghost in her own hometown. "Et c'est comme si je n'existais pas. La ville est hantée, elle a un fantôme et le fantôme, c'est moi" (L'Autre 183). Raclot states that the ostracized figure is encountered frequently in Green's fiction, and Karin is the prime example:

La solitude des héros greeniens est souvent intensifiée par le fait qu'ils sont en quelque sorte mis au ban de la société, exclus, à cause de certaines particularités de leur personne ou de leur vie, d'une collectivité à laquelle ils ne peuvent pas ou plus s'intégrer. Le cas le plus exemplaire dans ce domaine est celui de Karin. (127-128)

Karin begins to write in an effort to counter her loneliness. She asks herself: "Pourquoi j'écris ceci? Parce que je me sens moins seule quand j'écris" (L'Autre 185). Parenthetically, the fact that in this text a woman is writing is not to go unnoticed but is simply acknowledged here to be brought into the discussion again in chapters four and five. Her question of why she writes is indeed a provocative one. It is interesting that her writing begins at about the time when, after long social quarantine and sexual abstinence, she receives a letter from her former lover whom she believed to be dead. Like sex and death, writing is release, or as Nancy describes it:

Writing is naked. . . . From one to the other passes the light and violent tension of that suspension of meaning which comprises all 'meaning'; that *jouissance* so absolute that it accedes to its own joy only by losing itself in it, by spilling itself into it, and it appears as the absent heart (absence which beats like a heart) of presence. ("Excription" 65)

Derrida discusses the experience of writing as a kind of conversion, a departure from the commonplace world, an ordeal not unlike exile:

Cette expérience de conversion qui instaure l'acte littéraire (écriture ou lecture) est d'une telle sorte que les mots même de séparation et d'exil, désignant toujours une rupture et un cheminement à l'intérieur du monde, ne peuvent la manifester directement mais seulement l'indiquer par une métaphore dont la généalogie mériterait à elle seule le tout de la réflexion. Car il s'agit ici d'une sortie hors du monde, vers un lieu qui n'est ni un *non-lieu* ni un *autre monde*, ni une utopie ni un alibi. (Derrida, L'Écriture 17)

Writing for Karin takes her into another dimension of herself and provides a space of reflection on the vicissitudes she suffers and on the love she has lost. She gives herself to this project and produces, in the end, a novel that represents her narratorial voice.

A strange turn of events that occurs when Roger returns to Copenhagen culminates in Karin's religious conversion. Despite the radical difference in the attitude Roger exhibits before and after the war, he really has a unidimensional personality. Before the war he has an inordinate interest in sexual pleasure and after his return to Copenhagen, the same kind of intensity characterizes his religious passion. Karin gets much of her information about the intervening years of Roger's life from his letters, many of which he sends from his Copenhagen hotel

room in lieu of a face-to-face conversation. The close contact and desire for conversation that was evident in the Roger of ten years before, when he felt lonely and scared, are replaced by a distance and a demeanor bordering on indifference. He now prefers writing to talking for the former seems to give him more control of the situation.

Roger's goal is to convert Karin to his newly found faith. Karin reminds him that he was the one who had liberated her from religion: "Je suis libérée, grâce à vous" (L'Autre 221). Despite the seeming sincerity of his religious intentions, Roger's personality style is essentially oppressive, "tyrannique, insupportable" (L'Autre 231). His egotistical manner causes Karin to write: "Un regard froid tombait sur moi de ses yeux rapetissés par l'attention, comme s'il eût examiné un insecte" (L'Autre 226). And she adds:

M'ayant enseigné l'incroyance en 39, il voulait sans doute tenter maintenant l'opération inverse, me reconvertir dans l'autre sens, remporter une de ces victoires spirituelles qui flattent aussi la vanité masculine. (L'Autre 227)

Writing a review on this novel shortly after its publication, Jacques Petit says: "Mais je ne crois pas que Julien Green aime beaucoup le Roger de 1949" ("Pièges"). Roger seems as insular when he returns to Copenhagen as he was brash ten years before.

Karin finds stability only in her work: "Mon travail quotidien me permet de retrouver un semblant d'équilibre" (L'Autre 338). Late in her narration, Karin has strange premonitions. She dreams of dying (L'Autre 279-280) and receives the news of another young woman's death by drowning as her own obituary: "Elle l'avait fait à ma place" (L'Autre 317). Karin envisions the rapture of dying: "Le chant d'un oiseau parvint jusqu'à moi par la fenêtre entrouverte . . . suite d'un rêve qui se prolongeait. Mourir, pensai-je, mourir maintenant" (L'Autre 337). Karin's sentiment, if not suicidal, seems escapist, but an interesting contrast can be made between her outlook on death and Roger's. Earlier during his récit, he feels trapped and caged in by the coming war and his remark to himself is: "J'étais cerné par la mort. . . . Il fallait mourir" (L'Autre 77). Karin does not express a sense of being threatened by death. It is perhaps because acceptance of death is an acknowledgement of our animal sameness and an affirmation of the body. Nelson points out that sexual taboos have their origin in a human need to triumph over the body - over the animal within and over the inevitability of death (250). Karin accepts her body and, therefore, is not uncomfortable with the idea of death.

It is the spiritual dimension of her life that troubles Karin, and she has various experiences of hallucination and vertigo; she often feels "prise d'un vertige" (L'Autre 205). In one instance while wandering the streets at night, she looks skyward, "au-dessus de moi jusque dans les étoiles que je regardais au point d'en éprouver une sorte de vertige, comme si j'allais perdre l'équilibre et tomber en haut" (L'Autre 437). In discussing this remark, Tamuly quotes Simone Weil's Pesanteur et la grâce: "'La pesanteur morale nous fait tomber vers le haut'" (Tamuly 230). The moral tone of the text has an upward pull that feels like a gravity toward the heavens. An interesting contrast is presented in this image with that in Le Bleu du ciel in which the lights shining were from the lighted tombs blended with the stars below Troppmann and Dirty as they slid down the hillside into "cet abîme d'étoiles funèbres" (Bataille, III 481). Whereas the lure is toward opposite poles in the two novels, a mystic quality relates the two instances.

Karin's liminal state is most evident in her undecidability regarding religious questions. She deliberates over the clash in her thinking between her earlier Lutheran training and Roger's Catholicism. Inside the church she tells the priest: "Je veux être catholique"



(L'Autre 361), and soon after leaving, she discards her pledge completely. Karin pesters the priest with telephone calls, argues with herself in her writing, and fluctuates throughout her *récit* between her present disbelief and the possibility that she can believe in God again - and yet, she is not sure whether it is God she wants or the God of Roger or Roger himself (L'Autre 402). She lashes out against God: "Es-tu la cruauté toute-puissante ou la bonté toute-puissante? Que devient l'amour dans ton système?" (L'Autre 337)

When Roger leaves Copenhagen permanently, Karin searches for a relationship to replace him. Tamuly remarks: "L'absence est ici cette espèce de transparence qui permet au sens propre de passer au travers de l'amour de l'autre pour viser finalement l'amour de l'Autre" (263). Karin returns a final time to the church and says to the priest, "Vous saviez que je viendrais," (L'Autre 459) to which he responds: "Je vous attendais, Karin." Her next thought reveals the close connection that she makes between the sensual and the spiritual relationship: "Cela commence un peu comme un dialogue d'amour" (L'Autre 460). She senses an eternal seduction of the Spirit, a language of love that expresses both the desires of the flesh and the yearnings of the soul. "The similarity between the mystic

and the reveler lies in the unknowable element basic to each of their drives toward an absolute, which is why Green is able to appreciate both" (Stokes 110). It is through her writing that Karin is able to express her dilemma. She never expresses shame or regret, but she manifests an intense curiosity about the connection of the spiritual and the sensual that she feels deep inside herself. As Karin finishes her *récit*, she appears finally ready to break out of her personal aporia. She seems to have passed over the threshold from indecision to affirmation on the last night of her life. Jacques Petit comments:

Quelques instants seulement apporteront à Karin cette joie, quelques instants rares marquent l'aboutissement d'une aventure intérieure. Des images, des thèmes. . . ordonnés comme en un poème, 'le poème, dit Karin, de la solitude et de la faim.' ("Pièges")

An omniscient narrator, the fourth narratorial voice, tells the outcome. It is the twilight hour, and Karin writes the end of her novel. She experiences the writer's relief and brief happiness that surges through the soul upon completion of a writing project. "Elle rit et alluma la lampe. Tout reparut dans sa banalité tyrannique" (466). In a brief reverie, recollections of her various love affairs mix with memories of "une enfance croyante." She then has a vision of herself bathing the feet of the Savior "noyant de ses longs cheveux cette chair blanche . . . et

soudain. . . elle vit les plaies et poussa un cri" (466).

A sense of total well-being envelops Karin as a modern-day Magdalene: "une grande douceur l'envahit," and this turns quickly to a desire to escape her claustrophobic room where she has spent so many unhappy hours. She takes to the streets again - the site of happier memories like her many street encounters with Roger. But instead of a glad reunion with a man eager to know her better, she encounters harassment from two men who chase her into the harbor. Her attempt to scream is futile - she opens her mouth, but she has no voice. The narratorial voice that is, in this case, the woman's voice, is silenced.

The fourth part of this novel is the only one that is preceded by an epigraph: "Ne craignez point ceux qui tuent le corps et qui ne peuvent tuer l'âme... Matthieu, x, 28." It is noteworthy that this quotation from Matthew calls attention to a duality - a body-soul split, and I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter that this is a notion that reoccurs as a theme in Green's fiction. In this novel, the only voice to express a sense of shame or disgust about the body is Roger's. After he visits a prostitute, his need for cleansing is overwhelming:

[J]e me fis couler un bain et me plongeai dans l'eau chaude comme pour laver mon corps de toutes les caresses qu'il avait reçues. Pas un pouce carré de ma peau qui ne fût savonné à outrance .

. . avec une sorte de dégoût frénétique. (L'Autre 156)

By contrast, Karin seems to have integrated her corporeality into the spirit of who she is; she demonstrates little sense of the spirit-flesh dichotomy. The pain and regret she expresses is that she must endure the deprivation of human touch in post-war Copenhagen: "C'était un raffinement de cruauté de ne pas toucher à un cheveu de ma tête" (239).

The feminine presence in this text varies with the experience of the four narrators. The first narrator describes a dead woman, Karin, who is being mourned by Marie and scorned by another woman, an anonymous "vieille dame d'une voix coupante" (L'Autre 10). The contrast of the reactions of the two women who witness the tragedy of a third is insightful. It sets the scene for the undecidability and ambiguity that will surround the figure of Karin throughout the text.

For Roger the feminine presence is represented primarily by Karin since he finds in her exactly what he needs in these liminal circumstances. She is friendly, available, and intuitive, frequently reading Roger's mind: "Elle disait exactement ce que j'avais en tête" (L'Autre 134). She is enigmatic, at times childlike, "comme une enfant" (136), and at other times "une femme d'une

noblesse" (171). She can be imperial and authoritative which does not displease Roger: "Il est parfois délicieux d'obéir" (L'Autre 145), and she speaks French which allows her to cross the threshold into his world.

However, there are other women in Roger's *récit*, and they fall roughly into three categories: the erotic female, the transcendent presence, and the representative of conventionality. Roger has at least one encounter with women who fit each category.

The prostitute Roger visits is presented simply as an erotic body, "corps lisse et ambré qui luisait sous la violente lumière de l'ampoule électrique." Of her Roger has only a snapshot-like memory, "un seul coup d'oeil. . . la mémoire de cette joie brutale, panique, mal savourée d'abord dans la précipitation du désir" (L'Autre 155).

One woman who has both an erotic and a transcendent effect on him is Java, the first woman named in Roger's *récit* (L'Autre 25). She is an acrobat on a high wire with her male companion in an amusement park, and Roger sees her on his first evening in Copenhagen. As he wanders the streets alone, he follows the crowd into the park and becomes for a moment immersed in solidarity both with the acrobats above him as well as with the group around him on the street. The collective mentality of the crowd causes

all of them to hold their breath in unison for fear the two on the high wire will lose their balance: "Nous retenions tous notre souffle comme si, en effet, il eût suffi d'un souffle pour renverser dans le vide ce couple offert à notre contemplation horrifiée" (L'Autre 26). In a study of liminality, this street scene serves as the *mise en abyme* of this novel since it encapsulates the text in a dramatic instant: the high wire is the narrow, but elongated passage of the *limen*; the couple on the wire preview the coming relationship, precarious from the start, that Roger and Karin will have; the wire stretches across a metaphysical abyss from one end of desire to the other; the crowd below shares only a brief moment of unity before it disperses, and the reader is found within this transient assembly among the spectators, but intent on the high wire: "[S]oudain nous tous devenions ces acrobates dont la vie dépendait d'un équilibre ineffablement périlleux" (L'Autre 26). Once the acrobats dismount, the flood lights are extinguished and the crowd disperses, Roger is left alone in the dark, and he ponders the transformative power of the scene just past: "Dans ma tête recommençait l'hallucinante gymnastique. . . . La nudité splendide parlait d'autre chose que du corps. . . . La femme me paraissait au-delà de notre monde, comme une statue ou une apparition"

(L'Autre 27-28). The feminine presence in this instance is sublime.

The most vivid example of transcendence concerns his conversion experience. After the war and his return to France and while traveling in the French countryside, he stops in to see a small Roman-style church. When he enters the ancient, darkened building which seems "en pleine nuit" (L'Autre 254), and his eyes adjust to the darkened interior, he is surprised to see "deux très vieilles dames" (L'Autre 254) who are fixed in prayer "pareilles à des rochers." He exits into the brilliance of the sunlight where something happens inside of him - "quelque chose se passa en moi" (L'Autre 254). He reenters the church and realizes that these women are in a trance, and while observing them, he senses "une présence qui n'était pas sensible à ma vue" (L'Autre 255). Roger's conversion occurs in a surprising manner considering the logocentrism and patriarchy traditionally associated with Christianity. With no words spoken and mediated by a feminine presence, Roger experiences a kind of rebirth inside a dark womb-like church.

In the third category, the status quo, the woman who represents structured society for Roger is Mademoiselle Ott. As was stated above, she wants to be Roger's liaison

and to introduce him into a ready-made community in Copenhagen.

Mais tout brillait ici, tout respirait la prospérité, la paix, le bonheur d'une vie installée dans ses aises et ses habitudes. . . . Vêtue d'une robe de coton bleu sombre qui la serrait aux hanches, mais flottait autour des chevilles, elle se déplaçait avec une lenteur un peu majestueuse et semblait une masse de respectabilité bourgeoise. (L'Autre 42)

Mlle. Ott is polyglot, speaking Danish, French, and English. In French her name sounds like "hotte," which can mean a basket carried on the back or a ventilator over a stove or chimney. She carries a lot of weight (literally and figuratively), and she is the ventilator in the group since she is fluent in all the languages of her guests. In English her name sounds like "ought" which implies obligation and fits her role as the figure in the text most representing middle-class protocol. Her retarded brother, whose name is Ib, "d'âge mûr," "d'enfance inachevée" (L'Autre 12), resembles her in appearance and sounds so much like her that, when hearing them and without looking to see, their identities are often mistaken. Ib is easily seen as an abbreviation of *Ibidem* since he looks and talks like his sister (Ziegler 46). The book-lined setting provides a meeting place for a kind of *salon* society of shallow and materialistic people. This portrayal of the intellectually-impaired man who is the double of his



sister, a bookstore proprietor, can be seen as a critique of the pseudo-intellectual dimensions of the commercial literary enterprise. Roger rejects outright the gathering at Mlle. Ott's: "Tout à coup, je fus saisi d'un désespoir sans nom. J'eus l'impression d'être un animal pris par une patte dans les mâchoires d'un piège. Quitter cette maison, regagner la rue n'y eût rien fait" (L'Autre 77). He prefers to live independent of the obligations such a society would impose on him, but he remains on the threshold maintaining contact with Mlle. Ott without submitting to her dictates.

In Karin's *récit* only two other women are significant: Mlle. Ott and Marie. They represent two other aspects of this study discussed in the chapters preceding and following this one: transgressivity and community. Karin makes strong suggestions that Ott made unwanted homosexual advances toward her when she was quite young: "Elle avait tué ma jeunesse" (L'Autre 286). Ott killed Karin's youth, and in revenge, Karin precipitates Ott's death in a bizarre episode that is blatantly transgressive on Karin's part. Karin literally scares Ott to death by first threatening her and then masochistically watching as she dies of panic trying to telephone for help (L'Autre 272-286).

Marie Jensen, "la boulangère," is described by Karin as the only person in Copenhagen who makes any effort to accept her back into the community after the war:

Elle seule refusa de me traiter en coupable, elle seule me parlait devant des muets scandalisés qui me punissaient par leur silence. En agissant ainsi, elle courait le risque de déplaire à sa clientèle; néanmoins elle bravait tout le monde. (L'Autre 214)

She is portrayed as having "peu de religion" and "une gaieté naturelle" (214). She is forgiving, and she has a philosophical outlook on the past. Marie says: "Ce qui est fait est fait. Les Allemands sont partis et vous avez souffert comme cela" (L'Autre 215). Marie initiates what could have been Karin's reaggregation into society by giving her a birthday party and inviting various neighbors. Karin's initial reaction is one of relief, even delight: "Et posant le vase de fleurs dans l'évier, je me jetai dans les bras de la boulangère" (L'Autre 371). Karin sobs, and as she cries, she realizes that these are the first tears to roll down her cheeks in years. With the arrival of other guests, Karin discovers that she cannot tolerate their acceptance. When the school teacher arrives, Karin tells Marie: "Je n'ai rien à dire à l'instituteur" which shocks Marie since he is "un monsieur si correct" (L'Autre 376). Karin seeks an escape: "[J]e me demandai en regardant la fenêtre. . . si je ne pourrais pas sauter dans

la rue et fuir la bizarre épreuve d'une confrontation avec mes ennemis d'hier" (L'Autre 377).

Karin's on-going liminality is a choice for the lesser of two undesirable alternatives. She chooses aporia over societal acceptance because that at least provides her with options. Throughout the novel Karin maintains her marginal status, the voluntary nature of which is evident in her role first as Roger's lover, next as a mistress to the German officers, and later in her refusal to marry Emil, Marie's nephew, even though she finds him highly attractive. She does not want a middle-class life that is restricted to "un garçon raisonnable" (L'Autre 387).

Karin's actions throughout the novel indicate her preference for remaining a liminal figure. In this action she repeats the behavior of Roger; both of them reject the chance to become accepted members of a group in society. Both prefer the uncertainties of liminality to the security of a fixed position.

Karin is the only woman mentioned by the fourth narrator. In the final scene of the text, after Karin has declined her neighbors' efforts to resume friendly relations, she is taunted as "*Fräulein*" by the two men who accost her as she walks toward the harbor, toward the final *limen*. In the ensuing scuffle, "elle buta contre un grand

anneau de métal et, perdant l'équilibre, bascula dans le vide" (L'Autre 470). Her equilibrium, always precarious, is now lost as she is toppled at last into the void. The sea that was the scene of a renewal of life for Troppmann is the scene of Karin's death and of Roger's escape.

Roger is *dépaysé* at the end of the text just as he is in the beginning. The purest expression of his religious commitment was his vow to enter the priesthood, but at the end of the novel, in his last letter to Karin, he reveals he has changed his plans about the future. Abandoning his plans to become a priest, he has decided to leave France and go to South America where he wants to become an architect.

Dans la lettre équivoque où il apprend à Karin qu'il part pour l'Amérique du Sud, on lit entre les lignes l'échec de l'homme qui n'a la force de se sacrifier ni pour Dieu ni pour Karin, malgré la foi . . . malgré la souffrance de se séparer de la femme qu'il aime toujours et qui a tant besoin de lui. (Matuschka 240)

Roger is in perpetual liminality. He has given up Karin for his religious vow, and then gives that up also. By the end he is a passenger on a boat, which, like the hotel of the previous chapter, is a liminal place in itself, and he is on his way to a land where liminality is legendary. Throughout the text neither Roger nor Karin make any

permanent commitments, and they both make conscious choices to remain liminal.

This text seems anachronistic to twentieth-century fiction in some respects. It seems to me that it has many of the qualities of fiction of an earlier age. It is a love story, the narration is straightforward, and the woman dies in the end. It has an overtly religious theme that probably makes many twentieth-century readers uncomfortable and most commentators leery.

The author's authority, the narratorial voices, and the feminine presence offer three impressions of the liminality found in L'Autre. Green is a marginal novelist due in part to his cultural background but more especially to his subject matter related to the difficulty of writing good fiction which has a religious theme. His fiction offers a literary look into an honest search for Christian faith. The narratorial voice is split in this novel among four perspectives, one of which is that of a woman. Karin's voice expresses most consistently a sense of liminality and undecidability. Hers is the primary feminine presence, but other women are important in presenting the various facets of the feminine: the erotic, the transcendent, the traditional. In this chapter, women are the links to the transgressivity discussed in the

previous chapter and to the theme of *communitas* that will be the topic in what follows.

CHAPTER IV: *COMMUNITAS*:  
ASSIA DJEBAR'S L'AMOUR, LA FANTASIA

In terms of a sequence that begins with transgressivity in Le Bleu du ciel as an entrance into liminality, followed by a search for sacred meaning as a liminal activity in L'Autre, this chapter concerns *communitas*, a potential outcome of liminality as is evidenced in L'Amour, la fantasia by Assia Djébar. By giving voice to a particular group, this Francophone writer generates the possibility of a sense of community with disparate persons whose only commonality is a familiarity with the French language.

*Communitas* and community are terms that I will use in explicating this text, and while they are not equivalent, they do share a number of properties that I will try to delineate briefly at the outset. It is significant that neither of these terms, as they are used here, refers to that which could be described simply as congeniality or consensus. Of course, positive human relationships may and do occur within these contexts, but community and *communitas* are not identified merely by evidences of good rapport.

Victor Turner defines *communitas* on the basis of sociological data while Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot explain community in a philosophical context. Both Nancy

and Blanchot rely on Bataille. In L'Érotisme Bataille observes:

Toute la mise en oeuvre érotique a pour principe une destruction de la structure de l'être fermé qu'est à l'état normal un partenaire du jeu. . . . Il s'agit d'introduire, à l'intérieur d'un monde fondé sur la discontinuité, toute la continuité dont ce monde est susceptible. (L'Érotisme 24, 26)

For Turner, *communitas* occurs as a continuity within the discontinuities or anti-structures of society, a bonding beyond the formal societal bond (Dramas 45). He writes: "For me, *communitas* emerges where social structure is not" (Ritual 126). *Communitas* is a fusion that may occur among those undergoing the trauma, dislocation, and/or ecstasy of liminality.

Community, as Nancy defines it, has many of the same traits as Turner's *communitas*. Nancy regards the occurrence of community as a kind of parenthesis in the normal affairs of modern society. In La communauté désœuvrée he insists that instances of community occur apart from society rather than within it: "Si bien que la communauté, loin d'être ce que la société aurait rompu ou perdu, est ce qui nous arrive -- question, attente, événement, impératif -- à partir de la société" (Nancy 34). Nancy's italicized phrases underscore the important words that seem to connect his thinking to Turner's. His form of



community occurs in a relationship that is *à partir de la société*, separated from but linked to society, and Turner's *communitas* occurs in a situation in which participants are apart from but dependent upon society. The paradox of this bond/break with society inscribes a tension in the notion of community.

Nancy discusses an experience of community that surpasses the structured limits of society, of being and of thinking:

Mais j'essaie d'indiquer, à la limite, une expérience -- non pas, peut-être, une expérience que nous faisons, *mais une expérience qui nous fait être*. Dire que la communauté ne fut encore jamais pensée, c'est dire qu'elle éprouve notre pensée. . . . Rien n'est encore dit, nous devons nous exposer à l'inouï de la communauté.  
(Communauté 67-68)

It seems to me that Turner, in speaking of *communitas*, is talking about an exceptional instance of community in terms of Nancy's definition. In other words, it is not so much a difference in the context of the two experiences, but a difference in degree. *Communitas* represents fusion on an emotional plane that Bataille referred to in L'Érotisme as "la sympathie morale" (26).

Nancy considers Bataille's thinking to be seminal to an understanding of modern life. He states: "Bataille est sans aucun doute celui qui a fait le premier, ou de la manière la plus aiguë, l'expérience moderne de la

communauté" (Communauté 50). Nancy observes that the West is nostalgic for a lost community, a sense of unity, which he says never actually existed. The founding myth of Western culture is that of Ulysses who goes on a voyage (a liminal experience) and leaves behind him a palace filled with strife - "Le début de notre Histoire, c'est le départ d'Ulysse, et l'installation dans son palais de la rivalité, de la dissension, des complots" (Nancy 31). One of the ramifications of Western thinking is the tension created between the needs of the individual for sufficiency within the closed system of the self and the sense of incompleteness or lack that will invariably open one to others. Nancy states that a bias favoring community resides within an individual. "La communauté est au moins le *clinamen* de l' 'individu'" (17). The individual leans on or relies on the community, but the individual and society are always in opposition, and in the Western view, the individual takes precedence over society. In the age of humanism, the individual subject has received the focus of attention; consequently, the practice of "being in common" is often ignored.

Blanchot is echoing Bataille when he asks: "Pourquoi 'communauté'? La réponse est donnée assez clairement : 'A la base de chaque être, il existe un principe

d'insuffisance... (principe d'incomplétude)" (15). This sense of incompleteness continues to increase just enough to exceed its being satisfied (20). Blanchot claims that community continues to be always slightly beyond our grasp in any sense of fulfillment. Nancy adopts Blanchot's term "désœuvrement" and elaborates on its operations:

[L]e désœuvrement . . . rencontre l'interruption, la fragmentation, le suspens. La communauté est faite de l'interruption des singularités, ou du suspens que sont les êtres singuliers. . . elle est simplement leur être -- leur être suspendu sur sa limite. La communication est le désœuvrement de l'oeuvre sociale, économique, technique, institutionnelle. (Nancy Communauté 78-79)

Liminality is Turner's term for the condition of the individual involved in the *désœuvrement* of social structures; in this process, one is open to the possibility of *communitas*. A human bonding of this dimension only occurs in the liminal state where deprivations and/or dislocations lower the threshold of reserve and allow for a sense of fusion with another which, while it can never be complete and may even be only a momentary event, has enormous potential for renovating relationships in a context much larger than the site of its occurrence (see Ritual Process 127-130). *Communitas*, which happens in a liminal frame of time and space, can revitalize a society caught in oppressive patterns or in everyday mundaneness.

Thus, *communitas* corresponds at certain points to Nancy's *désœuvrement* as *inachèvement* in the sense that it is always unfinished. *L'inachèvement* is a positive dynamic that stimulates an activity represented by the French verb *partager*, which can mean to divide or share:

L'inachèvement est son 'principe' -- mais au sens où il faudrait prendre l'inachèvement comme un terme actif, désignant non l'insuffisance ou le manque, mais l'activité du partage, la dynamique . . . du passage ininterrompu par les ruptures singulières. (87)

To summarize, experiences of *communitas* can also be experiences of community as Nancy defines it, but not all instances of community are necessarily characterized by *communitas*.

Literature creates a community by providing works that are in Nancy's words: "textes intercalés, alternés, partagés, comme tous les textes, offrant ce qui n'appartient à personne et qui revient à tous : la communauté de l'écriture, l'écriture de la communauté" (Nancy 104). But in this community (which becomes that of readers as well as writers and literary critics), as in all other communities, the sharing/dividing consists of "le désœuvrement des oeuvres" (Nancy 98).

Djebar does a kind of "unworking" of texts by appropriating and inserting parts of other works on Algeria into L'Amour, la fantasia. She brings together material

from both the written and oral histories about her culture, information found in her research that she puts into play with her own lived experiences to create an historical, yet highly personal, account of the Algerian situation. The outcome is a text that speaks to many others and creates a sense of community among its readers. One such reader is Soumya Ammar Khodja who writes in "For Assia Djébar, Inspired by Her Book L'Amour, la fantasia" this acknowledgment: "I am one of your anonymous readers; although you never knew it, your writing wove with me deep bonds: interest, attention, the pleasure of reading" (793). Khodja poses a question that provides, in a sense, a frame for this chapter: "What is the power of writing, when confronted with madness, with the irreparable?" (794). At the end of this chapter, I will return to this question in addressing the current situation in Algeria. It seems to me that the population of that country as a whole has been thrust into a liminality, an instability created by madness. Djébar's text provides a *communitas*, a sisterhood of lament, for the madness in Algeria's history; and her work in writing L'Amour, la fantasia is the catalyst that bonds the women whose sufferings are described within this text together with the readers of the text. Within its pages readers can experience a blend of compassion and

protest that may serve as a shield and a defense against the madness fostered by irreparable violence and senseless death.

In a review of the literature on L'Amour, la fantasia, Djébar's inventiveness and courage in writing this text are affirmed. Much of the discussion focuses on the problematic of the gaze with the emphasis on the woman's appropriation of that which is traditionally thought to belong to men, especially in Arabo-Islamic cultures. In like manner, the active role of women in the Algerian revolution and the instance of a woman writing are transgressive activities. Most commentators note the characteristics of Djébar's style: its palimpsestic nature, the manner in which she gives writing an orality, and her practice of writing the body.

In "Reappropriating the Gaze in Assia Djébar's Fiction and Film," Mortimer writes of the dual subjugation of Algerian women by French colonialism and Maghrebian patriarchy. "Djébar claims subjectivity for herself and her Algerian sisters by reappropriating language, history, space, and the gaze" (Mortimer 859). Mortimer recounts Djébar's writing about a photograph made of her when she was four in her father's classroom with him and his male students. As the child stares back resolutely at the

camera's eye, she seems to accept the challenge of cultural dislocation and the "powerful promise of discovery" (865) that is involved in gazing into and out from the world of men. Hédi Abdel-Jaouad in "L'Amour, la fantasia: Autobiography as Fiction" claims: "Everything is sensed through the eye, for the eye motif is central in L'Amour, la fantasia" (26-27). Djebbar is able to visualize the Algerian story and present it with a painter's precision and "thus personalize its impact, especially on women" (Abdel-Jaouad 27). In "Dismantling the Colonizing Text: Anne Hébert's Kamouraska and Assia Djebbar's L'Amour, la fantasia," Mary Jean Green writes about the resourcefulness with which Djebbar uses the gaze. In describing the *enfumades* in which fifteen hundred Algerians suffocated, "Djebbar is. . .able to find. . . an inscription of a resisting look. . . . Only in her texts does the French army 'regarde la ville qui regarde'. . . . [T]his reciprocal gaze has never before been written" (Green 962). Laurence Huughe writes a very focused discussion on the gaze and optic elements in "'Ecrire comme un voile': the Problematics of the Gaze in the Work of Assia Djebbar." About this text she writes: "In Fantasia the author will reaffirm this role of the French language, specifying that what is important is played out in the realm of the gaze"

(868). Djebbar repeatedly shows that the invader's desire is voyeuristic. "Thus Djebbar's own text aims to turn back the invader's gaze through an original rewriting of the historical event" (Huughe 873).

Danielle Marx-Scouras in "Muffled Screams/Stifled Voices" says that in Djebbar's writing, women "come to occupy the male, public space of war in order to dislodge another space: . . . the intimate space of the female body" (174). They end up "risking their lives for an independence that exiled them from within. . . . Djebbar, Accad, and Mechakra seek a textual strategy that rejects the one of war" (Marx-Scouras 174, 179). Katherine Gracki in "Writing Violence and the Violence of Writing in Assia Djebbar's Algerian Quartet" speaks of the sacrificial theme as she discusses Djebbar's description of autobiographical writing as "a painful wounding process which causes not only her blood to flow, but that of others as well" (Gracki 835). The conquerors "killed as they wrote" whereas Djebbar, in her turn, takes the French language as "'war booty'" in order "to revive the dead and bear witness to their mortal combat" (Gracki 836). Mildred Mortimer in "Language and Space in the Fiction of Assia Djebbar and Leila Sebbar" discusses Djebbar and Sebbar as two Francophone writers who "express the concerns of Algerian



women struggling to break free from their traditional role as mute objects within a rigid patriarchy" (301).

Anne Donadey in "Assia Djébar's Poetics of Subversion" calls attention to Djébar's tactic of grounding her text in the work of others in "a long Arabic, even Quranic, tradition in which one must quote someone else in order to support an assertion, to legitimize one's report" (109). Djébar's epigraphs function as commentary on the title and the text, as legitimization, and as linking of intellectual and cultural traditions of the Arabic and French traditions. Her repetition of male discourse is a subversive strategy because of the difference created when the same words are spoken from a different position (Donadey 110).

H. Adlai Murdoch, in her article "Rewriting Writing: Identity, Exile and Renewal in Assia Djébar's L'Amour, la fantasia," explores the relationship between writing and desire. "Djébar writes woman as object of desire into woman as desiring subject" (111). She draws on the dialectic of the colonial encounter by putting in place a self that can give voice to the ambivalence and multivalency of the *métissage* of the cultural codes. Hafid Gafaiti in "The Blood of Writing: Assia Djébar's Unveiling of Women and History" states: "Djébar's work is an

exemplary expression of the problematic relationship between women and writing" (813). Writing, for women, is complicated by "the transgression constituted by the very act of writing" because she must "write against the other" (Gafaiti 813). In L'Amour, la fantasia the transgression is doubled because she writes against the dominant discourse first of France and then of Algeria. In her article "Assia Djébar's Contribution to Arab Women's Literature: Rebellion, Maturity, Vision," Evelyne Accad comments on the short history of fiction-writing by women in North Africa and the Middle East. In the mere sixty-year span, a remarkable development of theme, form, and technique has occurred revealing an evolution from identity crises to a self-empowerment. "L'Amour, la fantasia . . . functions on two levels, reflecting two journeys" (Accad 809), the personal and the historical. Djébar interweaves various voices into this joint journey - an exploration of her inner self and an examination of the history of Algeria. David Kelly in "Assia Djébar: Parallels and Paradoxes" also remarks on the musical pattern of this text and on the multiple voices heard at the end, "as though the author were trying to construct some kind of 'harmony' out of the conflicting voices present in the Algeria in which she grew up" (845). Kelly points out also that there is an

interplay of genres in this text: history, fiction, and autobiography. "As a trained historian, Djébar is scrupulous in quoting her sources. The questions which . . . this book most eloquently poses are: what is history and what is autobiography? What is fact and what is fiction?" (845).

In "A Stepmother Tongue: 'Feminine Writing' in Assia Djébar's Fantasia: An Algerian Calvacade" Soheila Ghaussy writes about *écriture féminine* and calls this text "a good example of a 'mother-based fiction'" (458). Djébar uses her novel to give voice to heroines who have survived dangers and torture during the Algerian revolution. She makes specific reference to the female body. Her language is "open and fluid, flirtatious and sensual" (Ghaussy 460). In "Disorienting the Subject in Djébar's L'Amour, la fantasia," Clarisse Zimra discusses the dilemma created in literary criticism around the work of Cixous and Irigaray and the influence of French feminists on Assia Djébar. "Woman's freedom can only come through the transgressive body. . . . In Fantasia, the body becomes autonomous subject-sign, articulating the transgression for which the severed hand serves as synecdoche" (Zimra 167).

The review of literature given above is helpful in establishing the direction that this study will take.

Especially useful is the discussion of writing upon which I will elaborate in the segment on feminine presence.

Commentary on the displacements of women is preparatory to my reading because they describe liminality without naming it. I will again look at the question of liminality in three categories: authority of the author, the narratorial voices, and the feminine presence in this text. I will try to explain why I feel that in each of these aspects, the sense of liminality is heightened here as compared to the other two novels in this study.

On the question of authority, it is significant that this text is the only one of the three included in this study that was written by a woman. Later in this chapter and in chapter five I will discuss the bearing that women's writing has on this study, but at this point, I mention it as one point among several that underscores this author's liminality. Another indication is the use of a pseudonym. In order to publish her first novel and to spare her family the embarrassment that using her own name would create, Fatma-Zohra Imalhayène chose the pen name Assia Djébar. Gracki relates the history of the name she chose: "After asking her fiancé to recite the ninety-nine ritual modes of address, Djébar selected *djebbar*, a phrase praising Allah, as her pen name." As it was transcribed into French, the

word was spelled *djebar* which in vernacular Arabic means "healer" ("Writing" 835). The intended and the actual meanings are, in my view, a fortuitous coincidence since it discloses the spiritual qualities of praise and compassion that are evident in Djebbar's writing.

Djebbar writes from a vantage point that intersects and interacts with various boundaries. The Islamic tradition and the Christian West form a border space that gives her, in addition to unique insights, a plurilingual culture. In L'Amour, la fantasia the writing itself is a convergence of autobiography, history, and fiction.

The Islamic-Western boundary is a construct that was not of Djebbar's own choosing since it was imposed very early in her life. She was born into an Algerian family in Cherchell in 1936, but she grew up in a *métissage* created by her use of the French language.

French, the colonial language, had become a paternal language in the sense that it was her bilingual father's tool in the workplace, his classroom. Moreover, he chose to converse with his daughter in French. . . . [H]e set her on a bilingual, bicultural, indeed an ambiguous journey that freed her from the female enclosure but sent her into a form of exile away from the majority of her sisters. (Mortimer, "Language" 301, 302)

In addition to attending the colonial French schools, she received instruction in the Koran. In an interview with Marguerite Le Clézio, Djebbar explains: "Jusqu'à l'âge de

dix ou onze ans, . . . j'apprends le Coran en langue arabe, sur une planche, avec un roseau! Je participe à un type d'enseignement très moyennageux" (Le Clézio 234).

Languages and religion are two components of the cultural conditions that juxtaposed the Eastern and Western mindsets in Djebbar during her formative years. "[T]he Eastern mindset tended to emphasize and value private rather than public life, in contradistinction to the Western approach, which tended to value the public display and outward control of others." (Accad, "Contribution" 808). While a liminal position between Eastern and Western thinking grants some privileges, it is not without its cost to Djebbar personally since she experiences a feeling of exile even within her own culture, the most painful aspect of which is a certain sense of disloyalty she seems to feel in writing in "la langue de l'ancien occupant" (Le Clézio 232).

In L'Amour, la fantasia Djebbar expresses her quarrel with the French language as well as other personal sentiments. In this novel, she "set out for the first time to write 'une preparation à une autobiographie'" (Donadey "Rekindling" 885), a project that is made very difficult for a writer like Djebbar because of the private manner in which one's lived experience is regarded in her culture.

Her upbringing taught her never to use the first-person-singular pronoun to talk about herself, since the singularity represented by the 'I' transgressed the traditional anonymity surrounding any confessional discourse. (Gracki 835)

Djebar has compensated by using the first person singular as a shifting signifier. "The *je* of Djebar's writings . . . is constantly floating, between roles and images, self and history, what is recounted and what is felt" (Kelley 844). She writes stories that women have related to her using the oral languages of her native area. Many of the women's stories refer to the abuse they suffered under the French invaders, but others relate the oppressions that women have endured that were perpetrated by Arab men.

Djebar's palimpsestic style appropriates and retells earlier historical accounts about the nineteenth-century war of occupation. She reinterprets men's writings by using citations and sayings from various sources: a quotation from Fromentin introduces the novel; the epigraphs introducing the three parts are all quotations from men: one from a Frenchman, Barchou de Benhoën, for part one; an Arab writer, Ibn Khaldoun, is quoted for part two; and Saint Augustine and Beethoven for part three. Her use of Beethoven's "*Quasi una fantasia*" emphasizes "an element of the text's title, *fantasia*, which refers to a method of musical composition in which fancy takes

precedence over formal conventions" (Woodhull 80). Part three, then, becomes her fanciful, liminal experience of researching and writing L'Amour, la fantasia.

Djebar's own liminality is foreshadowed by that of Saint Augustine who belongs to both Algeria and the Christian West. He is considered by some to be the founder of the Catholic church and of the Western tradition of autobiography (Donadey, "Assia" 108). He lived in Algeria and wrote in Latin, which was the language of the foreign conquerors of that epoch (L'Amour 241-242), and his style is informed by passion: "Sans cette passion, il se retrouverait nu" (L'Amour 242). Ibn Khaldoun also wrote in a language brought to his land by bloodshed. Like both of them, Djebar writes out of passion using the invaders' language, but she adds a dimension by writing over it, thus reappropriating and subverting the discourse of the conqueror. Djebar constructs a layered fiction of her own story and the one she exhumes.<sup>4</sup> The result is a "structure which adopts fragmentation and displacement as its primary discursive strategy" (Murdoch 72), and this style gives the text its heightened sense of liminality.

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<sup>4</sup>"Djebar comments on her 'architectural imagination' as what is left of her youthful urge to become an architect ('c'est ce qu'il me reste: jeune, j'aurais voulu devenir architecte')" (Zimra, "Disorienting" 157).



As the text alternates between personal disclosure and historical accounts written in a descriptive tone borrowed from notes and journals of the French invaders, the contrast between sensitivity and ruthlessness becomes stark. Pélissier “‘le barbare’” (L’Amour 92) carries out the brutal project of the *enfumades*, in which a whole village of men, women, children, and animals are burned alive in caves, and then he writes an account of it, and thereby, becomes “l’intercesseur de cette mort longue . . . et je reçois ce palimpseste pour y inscrire à mon tour la passion calcinée des ancêtres” (L’Amour 93). Almost a century and a half after the event in the caves, Djébar undertakes “une spéléologie bien particulière” (L’Amour 91) uncovering the layers of the palimpsest and plunging into the subterranean caves of memory to write the charred passion of a plural past revealing the plight of those who, formerly anonymous and without advocacy, now have a voice. “Borrowing from and rewriting of/over the Other’s text, Djébar’s strategy makes possible the surfacing of a female subject hitherto suppressed, cloistered, ‘veiled’” (Zimra, “Disorienting” 167).

Djébar establishes authority by creating her own style that relies on incorporating historical material into and around material to which she alone has access. The result

is a document of great value to others whether they come from Eastern or Western traditions because she has skillfully managed "to negotiate a subject position from within and from without two often antagonistic cultures" (Zimra, "Not so Far" 830). In that space, Djébar chooses to remove the veil from women by voicing their cries for liberation and revealing the sufferings they have endured.<sup>5</sup>

The narratorial voices in this text strive to recall a personal past and to retell stories from an oral history. In L'Amour, la fantasia the narratorial voice slides back and forth between third person to first person, and the *je* circulates as the storytelling shifts from one voice to another. Gafaiti claims: "The 'I' is written from the point of view of a woman in search of her self in a society which establishes a common predicament for all women" (814).

The unnamed narrator at times relates an entire episode consistently using the first person or the third

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<sup>5</sup>In regard to this project, Djébar undertook the directing of films in order to record remembered stories of the war; David Wills, speaking in response to Djébar's address on her film La Zerda et les chants de l'oubli at the seminar, Icono-Graphies: Verbal and Visual Interactions in Literature, Film, and Politics, March 15, 1996, said: "Memory is a woman's body under a veil." Only five days after finishing that film, Djébar began writing L'Amour, la fantasia; she calls it "un roman que je considère comme un tournant" (Le Clézio 243).

person pronoun. But the incidences that create for her an on-going undecidability are those in which the narratorial voice shifts mid-story. In the account of her marriage, she uses the third person for the initial scene involving her activities as a young woman as she and her fiancé are "exiled" in Paris where they experience a marginal existence while constantly evading the French police in order to avoid the fiancé's arrest. They flee French authorities by veiling their whereabouts with frequent changes of address. Then, the narrator shifts to the first person pronoun to describe their wedding scene that takes place in a small clandestine Parisian apartment where they attempt to observe some of the rituals of their own culture. In these liminal circumstances as she prepares to go through the nuptial rites of passage, the young woman yearns for the observance of tradition. She even starts referring to her future husband as "him," using the third person pronoun that is traditionally used by wives in her culture to speak of their husbands: "j'évoquai soudain l'homme à la manière traditionnelle" (L'Amour 124). The couple manages to observe some of the customs of their culture such as the formal engagement ceremony that takes place in Algeria a month before the wedding "malgré l'absence des promis" (L'Amour 119). However, she soon

realizes that customs cannot be easily transported, and this leaves her despondent. "Elle évoquait tout haut le protocole de leur cité qui, de ce lieu d'exil, leur semblait soudain engloutie ou détruite" (L'Amour 120).

Her mother comes for the wedding, but the trip serves a double purpose since she also visits her only son who is in a French prison "comme 'agitateur'" (L'Amour 120). The fact that her brother is in prison merely for agitating is simply one more factor in the accumulation of elements in this young woman's liminality. The father is an absent presence, and the young woman suffers from his absence. In a society that is as patriarchal as hers is, the father's presence gives validity to any ceremonial event, but she realizes that even if her own father were there, he would not observe the traditional ritual of weddings in regard to the father's role: "Mais la tradition exigeait que le père . . . enveloppe sa fille de son burnous et lui fasse franchir le seuil dans ses bras" (L'Amour 121). Since her father does not wear and would not borrow a *burnous*, his being present for the wedding would not satisfy the craving for tradition, a craving that wells up inside of her as she recalls the typical wedding of her culture. She observes a few of the Algerian marriage customs, at least symbolically, but the overwhelming sense is one of

liminality, of being cut adrift and caught on a threshold between a fugitive life (completely anti-structure) and a wedding (one of society's most formally-structured ritual occasions which normally introduces one into a settled form of adulthood). For her, the meaning of marriage is far removed from the settled life: "Le mariage signifiait d'abord pour moi départ: frontières à franchir à la hâte, conspirateurs nouveaux à retrouver sur une autre terre" (L'Amour 122).

The bride feels rebuked on her wedding night when the bridegroom, in spite of his best intentions, forgets to observe the ritual prayer "lorsqu'il franchirait le seuil de la chambre" (L'Amour 122), and though he does not habitually pray at all, he feels that forgetting this one prayer before the consummation of the marriage is an unpardonable omission and predicts: "Notre union ne sera pas préservée" (L'Amour 123). From the start she lives with the knowledge that her marriage will not be permanent.

The following days as the new bride travels around Paris on the metro, she studies other women and perceives a kind of veil over every female face. She asks herself why a woman, having once bled on the marriage bed, settles down and hides in a colorless silence: "Le sang une fois écoulé, s'installe une pâleur des choses, une glaire, un

silence" (L'Amour 124). Her question concerns the universal status of women and refers the reader back to the preceding chapter, "La mariée nue de Mazouna" (L'Amour 97-116), the account of a woman's exile as barter in marriage and booty in war as was the practice among the various rival tribes of Algeria. The disillusioned twentieth-century bride in Paris is part of a long history of brides in whom "l'amour, c'est le cri, la douleur qui persiste" (L'Amour 124). Following this confession of a young woman's disappointing initial experience of marriage is an interlude printed in italics, "*Sistre*" (L'Amour 125), a lifting of the veil on jouissance or sexual delight. This poem in prose serves as the close of the second part of the novel with the woman having now matured, capable of giving expression not only to her thoughts, but also to intimate feelings and desire.

Throughout the five movements of the third part, voices, often the *voix de veuve*, alternate with *Corps enlacés*. Poetic passages in italics are woven into the prose which is interspersed with voices, clamor, and whispers. The narrator seeks to recover the lost relationships with family and tribe as she relates the experience shared by women through the stories told to her in her mother tongue which she then writes in French in

what seems to be a phrase-by-phrase translation of the telling. The stories from the last century that comprise alternating segments of parts one and two serve as substructure and rationale for the passion expressed as women tell of their part in the war for independence from France.

One such voice is that of Chérifa, a name possibly derived from Djebbar's aristocratic family heritage. In her interview with Le Clézio, Djebbar says:

Ma mère faisait partie d'une famille qui, deux générations avant, gouvernait ma région natale. . . . Quand j'avais quatre ou cinq ans, et que j'allais dans les montagnes de chez moi, des hommes de soixante-dix ans se précipitaient pour m'embrasser la main. Parce que j'étais censée être 'chérifienne.' (235)

Chérifa, the girl soldier, and Lla Zohra, the mother of soldiers, both describe experiences of persecution, confinement, and torture at the hands of the French. Their fortitude and resolve in the face of incredible suffering is revelatory of the reasons the French cannot conquer the Algerians this time. But just as their activities of resistance were subversive and fragmented, their first-person narratives are broken into pieces and interspersed with other stories and passages which resemble poetry or song. As if in a conversation with a person who has lived long, knows a lot from experience, and assumes too much,

the reader is put in the position of a listener trying to piece together the life stories of Chérifa and Zohra. Chérifa fights like her brothers, nurses the soldiers, refuses any traditional role until, late in life, she marries a widower with five children. And Lila Zohra (Zohra is part of Djébar's given name) is a relative of the narrator who provides food, shelter, uniforms, and sons for the fighting men. She adopts a daughter who becomes her caretaker when Zohra is old and sainted. Both of these names are linked in family lineage with the narrator-scribe's mother, giving precedence to her maternal clan as the source of her ability to survive adversity.

In the third category of this study, feminine presence, a stark contrast exists between the out-spoken presence of women in this novel and the silent, veiled women in Algerian society. Outside spaces, places like the street, where so much of the action of Le Bleu du ciel and L'Autre unfolds in liminal sequences, become in this text highly controlled, structured localities because the street is the place in which Maghrebians men have their businesses, do their shopping, and sit in their cafes; consequently, streets are avoided by women as much as possible. I will examine the feminine presence in L'Amour, la fantasia by exploring these facets of the text: first, the veil as the



traditional site of the feminine presence; second, women's writing, especially *l'écriture féminine*, as a liminal activity, a kind of unveiling; and third, a look at *communitas*, one of the by-products of liminality, and one that becomes evident among the women in L'Amour, la fantasia.

Because wearing the veil is a practice with religious roots, it involves a great deal more than simple habit or custom. It is particularly complex since its purpose relates to and connects sexuality and religious practice. Widely different opinions exist on the subject, and it is beyond the scope of this study to try to identify and explain all of them. However, in exploring the theme of liminality, it seems appropriate to examine the ideas of some who view the veil as oppressive and endorse women's transgressing the custom and setting the veil aside.

According to Mernissi, the wearing of the veil is required of women, not because they are seen to be the weak, passive recipients of male desire, but because they are positioned in a role "more akin to the Freudian concept of the libido" that must be sublimated in order that society can function (Mernissi 1). "Women must be controlled to prevent men from being distracted from their social and religious duties. Society can only survive by

creating the institutions that foster male dominance through sexual segregation" (Mernissi 4). Following this line of thinking, it is not the strength of men, but their weakness that requires that all women be veiled since "the whole system is based on the assumption that the woman is a powerful and dangerous being. All sexual institutions . . . can be perceived as a strategy for containing her power" (Mernissi xvi). Nawal El Saadawi concurs:

Segregation and the veil were not meant to ensure the protection of women, but essentially that of men. And the Arab woman was not imprisoned in the home to safeguard her body, her honour and her morals, but rather to keep intact the honour and the morals of men. (99-100)

Some see fundamental differences between Christian and Islamic attitudes about sex. Mernissi delineates what she considers to be basic differences in the operative attitudes of the Western and Muslim minds on sexuality and the subsequent place and treatment of women in the two cultures. She states that in the Christian West, sexuality is often cast in opposition to spirituality, but in the Muslim context, sexual instinct is "pure in the sense that it has no connotation of good or bad" but must be used "according to the demands of the religious law" (Mernissi 1). However, Fedwa Malti-Douglas maintains that a strong similarity does exist between Christianity and Islam:

In both cultures, sexuality is not without pitfalls and ultimately participates in the creation of a distinctive misogynist view. . . . Yet these two variant misogynies do seem related to fundamental civilizational impulses. Where European Christian civilization has celebrated virginity and emphasized purity, Islam has opted for seclusion. (109-110)

It would be reductionist to suggest that the views of a few women commentators express a full range of women's opinions on the subject of the veil; it is simply my intention in selecting these statements to underscore my contention that in this text the veil represents that which inhibits self expression on the part of women.

The veil is prominent from the beginning of this novel as the narrator mentions it in the initial episodes of both her personal and historical accounts. L'Amour, la fantasia opens with a small girl on her way to school, a situation which, in the context of Algerian society, is highly transgressive and provokes the neighbors' consternation. This little girl is never to be veiled in the customary manner that inevitably causes all females to be invisible, and blind, "plus aveugle que l'aveugle" (L'Amour 11). That day on her way to school, she enters a way of life and a spiritual quest that will leave her at the end of the novel still undecided as she constantly reevaluates that event.

The historical backdrop begins at daybreak on a June morning in 1830 as Algeria becomes visible from the prow of

a ship in the French fleet. The city of Algiers appears in the shape of a veil, "un petit triangle blanc," and soon thereafter "la Ville Imprenable se dévoile" (L'Amour 14). Whereas the small girl's school experience liberates her from the veil, the unveiling of the city is so humiliating to the Algerian populace that the veil subsequently becomes a symbol of protection and of national pride for a people marginalized in their own homeland.<sup>6</sup> Those two morning moments produce a perplexed narrator because from her very first day in school, the little girl occupies simultaneously the two worlds that were created "ce 13 juin 1830, à l'instant précis et bref où le jour éclate au-dessus de la conque profonde" (L'Amour 14). The dawn arrival of the French forces explains why many years later she, as a grown woman, "corps dévoilé," will take her own daughter by the hand and leave at dawn - "Ma fillette me tenant la main, je suis partie à l'aube" (L'Amour 13).

The French language becomes a kind of veil within this text. The French officers hide their violence behind the written word. The small white triangle that was the "Ville Imprenable" (L'Amour 14), after it is captured by French

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<sup>6</sup>Frantz Fanon in "Algeria Unveiled" insists "wearing the veil signaled women's allegiance to cultural traditions . . . that enabled the emerging nation to forge an identity" (Woodhull 20).

military power, is held captive by a pyramid of paperwork, a French epistemic power: "Toute une pyramide d'écrits amoncelés en apophyse superfétatoire occultera la violence initiale" (L'Amour 56). French provides the narrator with an escape from the veil, allowing her to circulate freely even as it becomes a special kind of veil making her invisible to her own kin. Just as Algerian women felt no need when they were relaxing in the woods to put on the veil if the man approaching them were a Frenchman because, in their minds, he could not see them, the French language becomes the narrator's veil: "Comme si . . . la langue française aveuglait les mâles voyeurs de mon clan et qu'à ce prix, je puisse circuler" (L'Amour 204). While the French language offers the narrator freedom and an open window on the world - "La langue étrangère me servait, dès l'enfance, d'embrasure pour le spectacle du monde et de ses richesses" (L'Amour 143), it could also be a serpent's tongue, "dard pointé sur ma personne" (L'Amour 143). When she receives a compliment in French, it seems to cross a neutral zone of silence within her because while the French language opens outside spaces to her, it veils the intimate core of her being. As an Algerian child in a French school, the narrator compartmentalizes her life so that the French words she learns at school seem scarcely to affect

her at home, but she later realizes that, in this process, she internalizes the cultural split so completely that it forms within her an intransigence she later identifies as an "aphasie amoureuse" (L'Amour 145), and this prevents her from expressing her true feeling in any language; this realization coupled with the abuses suffered by her people at the directive of France causes her to be both hostile to and reliant upon the French language: "Je cohabite avec la langue française" (L'Amour 239). Her conflicting feelings remain an undecided dilemma throughout the text.

Djebar's focus on the experience of women in Algeria puts the two liminalities, the one created by colonialism and the other created by patriarchy, on parallel tracks. War is in the background of both of the other novels in this study, but Djebar writes of the chaos of war from the liminal standpoint of women's participation. During the struggle for independence, women in their anonymity were able to carry out some of the subversive activities of the revolutionaries by transporting bombs and other war materials under their clothing (Faulkner 851).

While it might be thought that the Algerian woman thus participating actively in such a serious undertaking would become cognizant of her own value and of her possible role as an autonomous person in society, in fact that was not the case. (Monego 130)

Rather, once women were perceived as capable of duplicity and subversion, they became suspect in the minds of the very men with whom they had worked for the liberation of Algeria. After the war, the women who served the war effort are left destitute. "A l'indépendance, les gens de la ville ne m'ont rien donné" (L'Amour 223) is a remark made by one of the women who assisted the revolution and was left widowed and poverty-stricken after the war. Djennet's aunt, also destitute, is refused help, "les gens continuaient à fermer leur porte à 'la folle'" (L'Amour 184). She makes her way to the home of her niece. It is significant that upon reaching Djennet's home, the aunt's expressed anguish is not over the ill treatment that she has received, but she is distressed because she lacks a veil:

Je cherchais un pantalon bouffant pour le desserrer à la taille et m'en couvrir la tête, m'en servir comme un voile; je n'ai pas trouvé. Qui m'aurait donné un voile? . . . J'arrivai chez Djennet, sans voile, ni burnous!... (L'Amour 184-185)

Exposed and cut adrift, she feels the loss and nakedness typical of a liminal experience.

Habits formed as a result of living in subjugation are not easily changed. Even within the harem an interesting phenomenon occurs that underscores the habituation and contagion of subservience in an hierarchical system. On

certain occasions within the harem, while women of affluence, free of the veil, dance and display their jewels and finery, an audience of less fortunate women are allowed to come in as "voyeuses." They can watch but cannot participate and must remain veiled (L'Amour 229). This practice is indicative of the chain-reaction of a hierarchical system that allows one group to show superiority and oppress another, "à imposer à leur tour le voile" (L'Amour 230).

The importance of writing this story is explained in the third part of this novel when "l'amour ses cris" becomes "l'amour s'écrit" (L'Amour 240), as the narrator, in a play on words, expresses the cries of Algeria that she writes as a labor of love. In this way the narrator employs her fluency in French against the former colonizer. She uses the high mobility of the French language - "les mots écrits sont mobiles" (L'Amour 11) - and its high visibility - "L'écriture est dévoilement" - (L'Amour 204) to unveil the suffering that Algeria and, more particularly, Algerian women have endured.

In Algeria, the woman's body when it appears in public is a monolith, covered from head to foot, anonymous. One discernible difference, the sound of her voice, marks her individuality, and to create a scandal, to become



marginalized among the marginal, a woman only has to raise her voice. The decibel level of the woman speaking is cause enough to ostracize her since "la seule réellement coupable . . . était 'la femme qui crie'" (L'Amour 228). To refuse to veil one's voice is an unpardonable offense because in breaking the silence and crying out, the situation of women is revealed as "une prison irrémédiable" (L'Amour 229). However, writing the scream allows for a veracity that orality suppresses: "Ecrire ne tue pas la voix, mais la réveille, surtout pour ressusciter tant de soeurs disparues" (L'Amour 229).

Before writing becomes a vehicle for the emergence of the woman's voice and of *écriture féminine* in this text, it serves to submerge the passions and to protect the body as a kind of veil over her adolescent innocence: "Je n'écrivais pas pour me dénuder . . . plutôt pour lui tourner le dos, dans un déni du corps" (L'Amour 72). The narrator first experiences the physical impact of the written word from the love letters she receives and sends as an adolescent confined within the four walls of her home but connected to the four corners of the Arab world through letters that "tentent de circonscrire cet enfermement" (L'Amour 71). She is initiated into the extension of the self that occurs through writing, and she confronts the

passion that the written word can unleash, especially the sense of climax attained in writing: "Un vertige de la transgression s'amorce. Je sens mon corps prêt à bondir hors du seuil. . . . La passion, une fois écrite, s'éloignait de moi définitivement" (L'Amour 72). Early on in the practice of the narrator, writing is an outlet for desire and requires a figurative unveiling that allows a sense of liberation within her own body.

Soon after her marriage, she receives from her absent husband a passionate letter that assumes a strange power of its own. The letter contains an intimate description of her own body that she scarcely recognizes as herself, thinking rather that this description really belongs to all women, "les autres femmes que nulle parole n'a atteintes" (L'Amour 73). Like a relic or a talisman she keeps the love letter in her wallet. Without her permission, it is read by another would-be lover: "Le regard de ce voyeur m'a communiqué un malaise" (L'Amour 74). Then, one day in the market, a beggar woman, carrying a sleeping baby on her shoulder, steals her wallet which contains the love letter, a mishap that does not actually displease her since the contents had already been violated by another man's gaze, and she felt the words must really be intended for some other woman anyway: "Ces mots retrouvaient leur vraie

place" (L'Amour 74). The true destination of these words is a woman who cannot read, decipher, or write desire, who is acted upon as object and, thereby, reproduces, but she, along with her progeny, are excluded from the society upon which they must remain totally dependent.

Through the experiences related to this letter, the narrator has a glimpse of the power unleashed in the written word, a power she realizes is found within herself as a woman who can write, a power other women wait for, a power she must have been searching for in the faces of women in the Paris metro on the morning after her wedding. The narrator imagines the stolen letter crumpled or torn up and discarded by the woman who stole it: "Elle aura froissé la lettre, ou l'aura déchirée en morceaux" (L'Amour 75). The narrator's image of the man's letter ripped into pieces figures the writing of this text which makes use of pieces or morsels clipped from material written by men. "As in the myth of Prometheus, to write for the woman, is to steal words, to tear them from social rule, from the masculine grasp" (Gafaiti 813).

In the first sentence of this text, the father's hand holds the narrator's; in the last segment of the novel, she figuratively picks up the severed hand of an Algerian woman that Fromentin had tossed aside, "main de la mutilation et

du souvenir et je tente de lui faire porter le 'qalam'" (*L'Amour* 255). In the Islamic culture, a woman holding the *qalam* represents transgressive activity "[f]or men only may hold the *qalam*, sacred stylus with which the faithful copy the Qran" (Zimra, "Disorienting" 168). This transgressive act allows the narrator to give to her foremothers the privilege of self-expression.

Telling women's stories through men's instrument of writing enables Djébar to create a female voice while at the same time destroying it (or rather destroying the orality that defines this female voice in the first place). Therefore, Djébar's method is inherently paradoxical: it blurs the boundaries of the spoken and the written by emphasizing precisely through writing, a language that is imagined to be spoken. . . . In this sense, Djébar's writing can be called a 'feminine language,' a '(m)other tongue,' or *écriture féminine*." (Ghaussy 458)

Djébar asserts: "[M]on écriture est sur le corps" (*Le Clézio* 242). Like liminality, which is a felt in-the-body experience since one is aware of the physical effects that changes in space and time have on the body (vertigo, sleeping disorders, angst, loneliness, etc.), *écriture féminine* is an in-the-body writing, one that takes note of the corporal dimensions below or beyond the head. While *écriture féminine* is relevant to this chapter, it is a broad subject and can only be included in this study in the form of some introductory remarks related to the discussion

of writing the body as mentioned by Djébar's narrator in this chapter. Then, in chapter five, I will comment further on how this innovation contributes to the liminality of literature.

Taking the term "*écriture*" used by Derrida as that which disturbs hegemonic discourse, several women have produced a highly innovative approach to writing that they have called *écriture féminine*. The publication of Hélène Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" in 1975 is considered by some to be one of the most significant literary events in this century (Zimra, "Disorienting" 149). In this treatise, her manifesto, Cixous writes about women in terms that challenge women to write:

We extend ourselves without ever reaching an end; we never hold back our thoughts, our signs, our writing; and we're not afraid of lacking. . . . Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity. . . . A woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor--once, by smashing yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction--will make the single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language. ("Laugh" 878, 885)

Another woman whose work is integral to this project is Luce Irigaray. In *Speculum de l'autre femme* she contends that women's language is indicative of their anatomy, and she celebrates the relational dimension of a woman's lips, the cave-like capacity of the womb, and the

passage from it to life. In Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un she boldly proclaims a feminine sexuality as she writes the body and explores the geography of her pleasure that cannot be demarcated by a center but is literally all over the corporal map:

Or, la femme a des sexes un peu partout. Elle jouit d'un peu partout. Sans parler même de l'hystérisation de tout son corps, la géographie de son plaisir est bien plus diversifiée, multiple dans ses différences, complexe, subtile, qu'on ne l'imagine... dans un imaginaire un peu trop centré sur le même. (Ce sexe 28)

She states that women are neither superior nor inferior to men. "They are *different*. And so *jouissance* (and not only children) is produced *inside them* . . . whatever the complexity of its spatial trajectories" (Reader 190).

Djebar's narrator comments: "La quatrième langue, pour toutes . . . demeure celle du corps" (L'Amour 203); she endeavors to give written expression to the fourth language in her culture, that of the body. Writing the body "lies outside the classical realm of duality assigned to the sensible and the intelligible. . . . [It] allows each part of the body to become infused with consciousness . . . [which is] an ongoing unsettling process" (Minh-ha 40). The project surpasses consciousness-raising since it is not enough simply to be aware of the body, it is important to give that awareness expression in writing. It

is an excavation to bring to mind and to express in language that which a woman knows in the depths of her being.

Djebar writes the body, and the woman's body becomes the speaking subject. She takes up the pen to record the woman as subject, as the speaker rather than the spoken to, and finds she uses her pen to highlight the corporal both in its physical and in its social dimensions. "Ecrire devant l'amour. Eclairer le corps . . . pour dévoiler" (L'Amour 75). A woman who removes her veil creates a scandal whether that veil is literal or figurative. Djebar asks "'Qu'est-ce que c'est dans une culture arabe qu'une femme qui écrit?' C'est un scandale. Ce n'est pas seulement très rare; pendant des siècles, ça a été étouffé" (Le Clézio 232).

Throughout L'Amour, la fantasia the body speaks. Hands figure prominently; they extend the boundary of one body to connect with another as when a parent, holding the hand of a child, leads her across a new boundary (L'Amour 11, 13); hands implore as when Djennet, seated on her threshold, prays: "Occuper mes mains, ô prophète. . . pour desserrer les dents de l'angoisse!" (L'Amour 172); hands cleanse as the child, Chérifa, tries to wash her dead brother: "J'ai pris de l'eau dans mes paumes. . . comme

pour des ablutions" (L'Amour 138); her hands, red with henna or blood, speak: "Est-ce la voix de la fillette aux doigts rougis de henné et de sang fraternel?" (L'Amour 140). But the hand is also cut off, severed from the care it offers. The amputated hand becomes the hand of *écriture féminine* recording the stories of mutilation.

The French soldier cuts off the foot of the Algerian woman, the other's other, to get an ankle bracelet, "ce pied de femme que quelqu'un a tranché pour s'emparer du bracelet d'or ou d'argent ornant la cheville" (L'Amour 68), an incident that serves as an illustration of France's ravaging Algeria for material gain, and of the military strategy that requires defeating the enemy by mutilating its women. "Impossible d'éteindre l'ennemi dans la bataille. Restent ces échappées : par femmes mutilées" (L'Amour 68). The foot, the part of the body most essential to a woman's mobility, is cut off.

Djebar's narrator re-members women's stories by putting them, like once-severed body parts, into a context where they can no longer remain discontiguous. The narrator inscribes the energy generated by the collection of storytellers to participate with them in creating a *communitas*. Djebar has said in an interview about her work: "Je pense que si mon travail romanesque a une



utilité extérieure à moi-même, c'est pour essayer de faire renaître la conscience de solidarité entre femmes" (Le Clézio 240). This solidarity first occurs in the narrator's relationship with her girl cousins on her summer visits to their house. Although a bonding between the narrator and women of her family and culture is later inhibited by her never taking the veil, as a child she is a partner with her girl cousins in various childhood transgressions - for example, the episodes of letter writing to Arab young men whom they did not know. She remains a keen observer in the harem and witnesses scenes of *communitas* inspired by the dance and the celebration of weddings and funerals.

It is twenty years after the war for Algerian independence that the narrator's bonding to other women is forged through her inquiry into the stories of their participation in the war. She provides the medium for disclosing the stories of their suffering, and through her the women find an enabling empathy with one who will listen to them and who has the skill to record what they say in such a manner as to link them to a greater community outside their own borders. "In traditional Algerian society, as we see in Djébar's narrative, women possess no enabling dialogue. Their speechlessness, their aphasia,

presents an otherness that is characterized by a hermeneutical aporia" (Erickson 318). Without someone like Djébar, their stories would never find an audience, and their suffering would appear to be futile.

The narrator is encouraged because she sees a number of women emerging out of their historic confinement: "Le corps de mes soeurs commence, depuis cinquante ans, à surgir. . . hors de plusieurs siècles de cantonnement" (L'Amour 240). The stories of women are written into a collage; to the central stories of Chérifa and Zohra are added other vignettes to form a community of women whose pain has an echo in the experiences of women in the past such as the young pregnant Algerian woman who, on a ship into exile in 1843, gives birth to a still-born son. Within the sorority of suffering described at the end of her *récit*, Djébar's narrator introduces someone unexpected, Pauline Roland, who is a Frenchwoman, exiled after the revolution in France in 1848 and sent to Algeria. After four horrible months she, very ill, is put on a ship, and sent back to France to die. As a result of her story being inserted into this chronicle, the universal nature of this feminine *communitas* becomes evident. "By expanding the French documentary resources to include the words of this sister in oppression, Djébar has found a gap in the

hegemonic perspective which opens the possibility of real communication" (Mary Jane Green 965).

One of the attending attributes of *communitas*, according to Turner, is its "aspect of potentiality" (Ritual 127). This aspect is evident here as Djébar presents a collage of women's stories that have the potential to permeate the consciousness of the readers of her text and to promote a community advocating the rights of women in cultures like the one she describes. She has accepted the challenge of giving voice to a voiceless population, and, through writing the body, she has initiated a project from which other creative endeavors will likely emerge. Derrida addresses the subject of potentiality:

Cette possibilité du possible accumule, d'une part, le sens de la virtualité ou de l'imminence de l'avenir . . . et d'autre part, le sens du pouvoir, du possible comme de ce dont je suis capable, ce dont j'ai la puissance, le pouvoir ou la potentialité. ("Apories" 332)

A true artist with a visual acuity akin to that of painters like Delacroix and Fromentin, Assia Djébar has the potential as a very physical writer to lift the veil and to paint with words the plight of women who are oppressed. Like a musician, she composes a symphony that ends with a coda, called "Air on Nay," a simple composition on a flute. An interesting coincidence is found in the work of the

artist, Djebbar, and the social scientist, Turner. Djebbar entitles the ending of this novel "Air on Nay," and Turner makes this observation about wind instruments:

It is . . . fascinating to consider how often expressions of *communitas* are culturally linked with simple wind instruments (flutes and harmonicas) and stringed instruments. Perhaps, in addition to their ready portability, it is their capacity to convey in music the quality of spontaneous human *communitas* that is responsible for this. (Ritual 165)

The sense of *communitas* is brief as Djebbar's narrator listens to the stories of these women who relate them in an interlude before they seem to sleep again - "font semblant à nouveau de dormir" (L'Amour 255). It is the empty place of their aphasia at the center that holds the women together in *communitas*, just as the empty hole in the center of the wagon wheel holds the spokes into the circle (Ritual 127). The sense of on-going aporia persists: "Quel rivage s'annonce pour moi, rêveuse qui m'avance, retrouvant la main de la mutilation que le peintre a jetée?" (L'Amour 255). Reconstructing the memory of which the severed hand is emblematic allows the suffering of the past to be expressed in the safe presence of a sympathetic listener. The moment of *communitas*, however, is fleeting.

Already she hears the death cry coming: "Oui, malgré le tumulte des miens alentour, j'entends déjà, avant même qu'il s'élève et transperce le ciel dur, j'entends le cri

de la mort dans la fantasia" (L'Amour 256). The worst possible eventualities of that prescient thought are being realized in the country of Algeria today with the death cry sounding more and more frequently and to increasingly large numbers of people. The carnage that has occurred in Algeria in the on-going civil war between Islamic militants and the secular government has claimed thousands and thousands of lives. This brings the discussion back to the question posed in the introduction of this chapter by Soumya Ammar Khodija:

What is the power of writing, when confronted with madness, with the irreparable? Certainly, writing can do nothing. But I believe that it embodies a tiny flame of humanity burning against hate, a promise of beginning again and holding fast against discouragement, a decision of freedom. (794)

Djebar's narrator uses words as torches to carry the light for her companions: "Mots torches qui éclairent mes compagnes" (L'Amour 161). But her words are heavy and she must leave her native land because of them: "Et sur leur poids, je m'expatrie" (L'Amour 161). The dilemma created for her by language, by her Westernized education, and by the plight of Algerian women with whom she uses her skill in language to express a heart-felt *communitas* leaves Djebar's narrator at the end of L'Amour, la fantasia in a state of on-going undecidability.

It would seem that if liminality could be measured, the gauge would register significantly higher for this novel than for either of the other two in this study. The author is a woman Francophone writer who writes across cultural boundaries that involve customs, languages, and a religion different from that of most French literature. Moreover, in her writing she criticizes France and maintains a kind of love-hate relationship with the French language. The narratorial voices are numerous and they intermingle first-person and third-person narrations in a style that is closer to oral language than to written. The reader must decide who is speaking and who is being described and whether the subject and the object in each case are the same figure in the *récit*. The feminine presence is usually found under the veil in Algerian culture, but the writing woman removes the veil in order to lift oppression from women and to remember by writing the body - its suffering and dismemberment. In so doing, she creates a *communitas*, a sense of bonding between the storytellers and herself. *Communitas* is found in momentary instances within the text, but it has the possibility of infusing into readers a sense of community which has a renovating potential.

Djebar is not presently living in Algeria, but her heart and her writing are still centered on the events taking place there. Oran, langue morte, published in 1997, is an intimate portrayal of the suffering brought about by fundamentalist religious beliefs. She writes in the Postface an observation that seems to dash the prospects expressed in L'Amour, la fantasia for a better future for women:

A propos de l'Algérie et dans son sillage, 'le monde muet' serait pour moi non seulement celui des choses (de la crevette, de l'orange, des figes...), mais aussi, depuis des générations, celui des femmes, masquées, empêchées d'être regardées et de regarder, traitées en 'choses.'  
(Oran 377)

In my view, the hope for Algeria lies in activities taking place in the liminal spaces where writers like Djebar are trying to give voice to the unspeakable.

## CHAPTER V: LIMINALITY OF LITERATURE

In chapter one of this study of "Functions of Liminality in Literature," I introduced the sociological and philosophical bases of liminality along with a survey of its applications to literature as a preparation for the study of three specific texts. Each of the texts functions to illustrate a facet of liminality: transgressivity in Le Bleu du ciel; search for sacred meaning in L'Autre; and *communitas* in L'Amour, la fantasia. At the end of chapter one, I advanced the notion that liminality could also be useful in interpreting the epistemological displacement of our present time - in other words, I suggested that liminality has a larger application to literature than a thematic element in the analysis of literary texts. Having started with a broad overview of the topic and narrowing the discussion to three particular novels, I would like now to widen the discussion once again to explore functions of liminality in literature and literary studies.

As I will discuss below, it seems that during the twentieth century, especially in the past thirty years, literature has entered a kind of liminality. As I stated in chapter one, I am using the term "literature" in the large sense of the word to include both that which is written as literature and that which is written about it in



literary studies (theory and criticism). I use the word "literature" in that larger sense because I want to focus in this chapter on literary studies as the transgressive element which has prompted the epistemological displacements in the academic discipline that is literature. Having examined three instances of the functions of liminality in fiction, the focus in this chapter is on two approaches to literary theory, deconstruction and feminism, that have, in my view, moved literature and literary studies into a liminality. My intention here is certainly not to attempt an in-depth discussion of deconstruction or feminism but simply to make an amplified statement maintaining that both have had a destabilizing effect on the study of literature.

Authority, narratorial voice, and feminine presence, the schema for chapters two, three, and four, serve here again as a structuring device to explore this larger dimension. In literary studies during the last thirty years, authority has been contested, voices have proliferated, and the feminine presence has emerged as a strong contributor to critical studies. A certain interface operates between the dynamics of liminality, as I have defined them, and this schema: authority has been challenged by transgressive practices; voices have

proliferated in the search for meanings; and the feminine presence has changed the composition of the writing community. I will mention the manner in which deconstruction and feminism have transgressed existing authorities in a search for alternative meanings, and have, in that endeavor, altered the nature of the literary community.

In the last thirty years, something of a paradigm shift has occurred, and literary criticism has emerged as a strong force in its own right, rather than simply a corollary discipline to the reading and writing of literature. Formerly, the symbiosis between the writing of literature and writing about literature involved the obvious link - without literature there would be no literary criticism. Conversely, literature has derived much of its academic standing from the investigative and theoretical discourse of literary criticism because theory adds credence and legitimacy to any field of study in this scientific age. It is the investigative approach of the critic who makes judgements and confers meanings upon a piece of literature, and this exercise tends to establish intellectual respectability for fiction. However, in recent years simultaneous to keeping literature academically fit, literary theory has worked to challenge

the structures of literature by acting as an anti-structure which has become a force strong enough to move literature into a kind of liminality with respect to it, at least within the academy. This move has also been sufficiently powerful to transgress borders of academic disciplines and provoke the entire intellectual community.

It is my perception that the study of literature entered a kind of liminality with the onset of deconstruction because deconstruction negates, undermines, or transgresses commonly-held, authoritative interpretations of philosophical discourse that underlie the writing and reading of literature. Derrida, by revealing how a word always hides within itself the trace of other words and other meanings, opened the central writings and philosophical axioms of Western culture to a vigorous reevaluation. In his seminal work, Of Grammatology, he writes: "It is less a question of confiding new writings to the envelope of a book than of finally reading what wrote itself between the lines in the volumes" (86).

Authority for literary critics in the not so distant past was fairly assured for those who found their niche in one of the categories of criticism - structuralism, psychoanalytical, or Marxist theory, for example. Our present era is popularly referred to by associations with

the past, i.e., by adding a prefix to labels that formerly seemed authoritative: post-structuralist, post-Marxist, post-modern, etc. The authority implied in terms like Marxism and structuralism is called into question by this prefix. Mark Poster states:

The philosophes were master impressionists whose collective textual voice ventriloquized that of humanity but spoke for a particular social class. . . . The poststructuralist project is far more modest. It aims at a detotalized position that, finally, is uncertain of itself, a strategic intervention in an indeterminate field of forces whose outcome is contingent. (31-32)

In working past structuralism, Marxism, etc., the present-day critic seems to maintain authority by suspending it, a suspension that, according to Derrida, puts one on the way to "le passage impossible, refusé, dénié ou interdit, voire, ce qui peut être encore autre chose, le non-passage . . . le 'se passer' d'un événement qui n'aurait plus la forme ou l'allure du pas: en somme une venue sans pas" ("Apories" 312). Since the word *pas* can mean either "step," "passage," or "not," Derrida's statement seems to be a reflection on a time to come that would no longer have the form of a step or a passage or the allure of a negation; it is a non-passage, an aporia, from which passage may not be possible. In the context of this study, the aporia from which passage may not be possible signifies an on-going liminality. Derrida asks: "Comment

justifier le choix de la *forme négative (aporia)* pour désigner encore un devoir qui, à travers l'impossible ou l'impraticable, s'annonce néanmoins de façon affirmative?" ("Apories 316). He continues by stating that the negative form counters the subjective certitude that is incompatible with the risk involved in every responsible decision: "[L]a bonne conscience comme certitude subjective est incompatible avec le risque absolu que doit encourir tout gage, tout engagement, toute décision responsable - s'il y en a" ("Apories" 316).

Derrida emphasizes that "la barre mobile entre le et/ou, et-et ou/et ou/ou, est une singulière frontière. . . à la fois conjonctive, disjonctive ou indécidable" ("Apories" 318). An uncompromising rigor abides in undecidability, as Derrida uses it, because it never allows the focus to slip away from the decision while, at the same time, it acknowledges the indecisive elements that persist throughout the experience of decision. Undecidability is essential to decision since without it, decision is impossible; the so-called decision would, without undecidability, become programmed: "Une décision qui ne ferait pas l'épreuve de l'indécidable ne serait pas une décision libre, elle ne serait que l'application programmable ou le déroulement continu d'un processus

calculable" (Derrida, Force 53). It enables decision while it simultaneously inscribes the structure of impossibility, even as a decision is made. It necessitates an on-going cohabitation of decision and the undecidable - a liminal double bind that makes decision-making more urgent even as it makes it more difficult. Derrida continually calls attention to the undecidable as an integral aspect of philosophical studies, and by extension it affects any decision concerning the status of literature. That problematization of the literary amounts, in my terms, to a type of liminality.

In Écriture et la différence Derrida uses the term *écriture* to denote writing that disturbs the logocentrism of literary and philosophical thinking. Derrida encourages the reader to abandon the comfort zone which could be described as a kind of servility to the text. He uses Bataille's work on Hegel as a model and points out how Bataille's critique of Hegel inevitably arouses a subsequent rebuttal from the philosopher who has long ago worked out and settled into a philosophical system:

Le philosophe s'aveugle au texte de Bataille parce qu'il n'est philosophe que par ce désir indestructible de tenir, de *maintenir* contre le glissement la certitude de soi et la sécurité du concept. Pour lui, le texte de Bataille est piégé : au sens premier du mot, *un scandale*. (Écriture 393)

The undermining of authority that the "transgression du sens" represents constitutes an epistemological dilemma of major proportions, "suspendant l'époque du sens" (Écriture 393), a dilemma that manifests itself in a liminality which functions to disrupt literature as writers, commentators, and readers begin to take cognizance of its implications.

Literature has been the venue for interrogating the larger issues of knowledge and truth. In an interview with Derek Attridge in Acts of Literature, Derrida says:

If the question of literature obsesses us, and especially this century, or even this half-century since the war, and obsesses us in its Sartrian form ('What is literature?') or the more 'formalist' but just as essentialist form of 'literarity,' this is perhaps not because we expect an answer of the type 'S is P,' 'the essence of literature is this or that,' but rather because in this century the experience of literature crosses all the 'deconstructive' seisms shaking the authority and the pertinence of the question 'What is ...?' and all the associated regimes of essence of truth. (48)

Derrida's challenge to "regimes of essence of truth" tends to threaten traditional patterns of reading and writing. Authority of any kind is highly dependent on certain accepted truths and on adherence to structure or conformity, and it can be easily threatened by disparity. Literature, having ascribed to itself a certain authority in the past, is presently in a liminality provoked by the challenges and transgressions of a whole body of

theoretical work, of which a major example is deconstruction.

By calling attention to the received nature of the operation that confirms authority upon some and refuses it to others, Derrida and others writing under his influence have opened a space for diverse voices to speak - voices not on the inside, but speaking from the position of a witness in the border spaces that have been opened:

*Enfin, cette contrebande contaminante restant irréductible, elle s'insinue dès l'idiome de l'analytique existentielle. On pourra toujours considérer celle-ci comme un témoin - et je laisse à ce mot de témoin l'ambiguïté par laquelle . . . nous avons caractérisé cette clause d'appartenance sans appartenance qui est la condition de tout témoignage. (Derrida, "Apories" 338)*

Due to the shaking of the authoritative foundations, disparate voices can now gain a critical hearing when they speak out as witnesses even though they are liminal - belonging and yet not belonging.

Since the Second World War, the rise of feminism and the demise of colonialism have opened the speaker's dais to voices from segments of the population that were previously kept silent and considered insignificant. The pluralization of voices in literary critical studies allows a fuller search for meaning since voices of "others" offer insights unavailable heretofore. The result is certainly



not a polyphonic chorus of world harmony in which each voice is heard sympathetically. The voices truly are disparate and often dissonant. Such an environment, though not always affirming, is more affable than ever before to writers regardless of their gender and ethnicity.

I pose again Jardine's question from chapter one of this study: "Why, at the end of the twentieth century, has 'the feminine' become a wide-ranging area of concern?" (Gynesis 27). While the word "feminist" has political connotations, Jardine points out that the term "Woman" has been "infinitely expanded" to become emblematic of "rhetorical space" (Jardine 38). Some of the foremost men theorists have defined it thusly as Jardine's roll call illustrates:

To limit ourselves to a general set of writers . . . 'she' may be found in Lacan's pronouncements on desire; Derrida's internal explorations of writing; Deleuze's work on becoming woman; Jean-François Lyotard's calls for a feminine analytic relation; Jean Baudrillard's work on seduction; Foucault's on madness; Goux's on the new femininity; Barthes's in general; Michel Serre's desire to become Penelope or Ariadne. (38)

In spite of the problems presented by this appropriation by men of the word "woman" in their writing, many women writers have found an opportunity in this epistemologically prominent moment to examine men's thinking for what they could learn about themselves (and about men). Women have

learned various strategies from men and from each other in order to maximize the unusual amount of attention the word "woman" has received. Women have been disciples and adversaries of the men theorists (and sometimes disciple turned adversary) in order to speak from their own particular perspectives.

After so many years of questioning and conjecturing about women by men, the discussion has been opened to women by women. In an interesting turn from the use of the term "woman" as a philosophical abstraction, Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and others have accentuated the corporeality of women in a highly interpretive manner known as *écriture féminine*. Pronouncements about what women are supposed to feel and think are challenged by what they do feel and think. It is difficult to express how overdue this development seems. In its effect, *écriture féminine* is an effort to free women's voices from the constraints that the hegemonies of both Eastern and Western cultures have imposed. Cixous writes: "Woman un-thinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield" (Laugh 882). *Dé-pense*, translated "un-think," is a neologism that plays on the French words *penser*, to think, and *dépenser* meaning to spend. Women who "un-think" the hegemony spend

their capabilities for a liberation of individualities. This process is undertaken by "peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate" (Laugh 883). In other words, this process occurs in liminality.

Irigaray also takes issue with Western culture's phallogentrism; she seeks transformations of societal structures in order to eliminate the necessity for women to become like men: "Comment articuler la double 'revendication': d'égalité et de différence? Certes pas en acceptant le dilemme : 'lutte des classes' ou 'lutte des sexes'" (Ce Sexe 78). She advocates speaking from the margins or from a position of liminality:

Si je parle de marginalité, c'est que, d'abord, ces mouvements, pour une part, se tiennent délibérément à l'écart des institutions et du jeu des forces au pouvoir, etc. 'En dehors' des rapports de pouvoir déjà existants. (Ce sexe 126)

She insists that in order for women to be heard, this liminal position is necessary because within the societal structures, women have been simultaneously used and excluded. She posits a need for women to write because as long as writing is monopolized by one sex, it remains "un instrument de production dans un régime de propriété inchangé?" (Ce sexe 129). She calls for a new ontology that would replace the system of unity with one of duality in order "to promote the recognition of all forms of others

without hierarchy, privilege, or authority over them: whether it be differences in race, age, culture or religion" (Irigaray, "The Question" 19).

Irigaray practices *écriture féminine* by adopting an approach borrowed from psychoanalysis whereby genitalia and sexuality become metaphors; in addition to the phallic metaphors that are already familiar images in discourse, she writes woman's sexuality into critical theory. A psychoanalyst herself, Irigaray created a scandal with the publication of Speculum de l'autre femme and Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un in which she critiques classical phallogentric philosophy particularly as it is presented through Freudian and Lacanian theory. She alienated her colleagues by her attack on psychoanalytic theory and angered other feminists by presenting a view that appeared to some to be a regression rather than an advance in feminist discourse.

As fervent as proponents of *écriture féminine* have been, its detractors are ardent also. They criticize the works of Cixous and Irigaray as essentialist in nature, narcissistic in function, and unclear in logic.<sup>7</sup> Apart

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<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of such objections, see Susan Rubin Suleiman, "(Re)Writing the Body: The Politics and Poetics of Female Eroticism," The Female Body in Western Culture: Contemporary Perspectives (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1986) 7-29.

from agreement that women have been too long deprived or ignored as writers, there is little consensus about and among women. The emphasis most significant to this study is that the feminine presence, active and passive, in literature and literary theory has both participated in and been the result of the liminality of literature that has occurred in the last thirty years.

The appearance of a range of texts that could be included within the rubric of *écriture féminine* is, at the present time, a kind of liminal experiment. In my view, it is not a substitute for literature as has been practiced, nor is it simply an alternative to give women (and men) the pathway for expressing the language of their bodies. Rather, it is an innovation that valorizes difference and gives expression to the body in a manner that may exceed the rational and may provide a kind of knowledge that does not have to be logical and a thinking that does not have to be linear.

The feminine presence in writing and critiquing literature changes the composition of the literary community. As discussed in chapter four, community and *communitas* take place in border spaces but cannot be planned or willfully produced. *Communitas* offers the spontaneous moment of finding in another a shared

*jouissance*. For those involved in writing literature and writing about literature, this may occur within the exchange of words and of silences in which the expression of an unfinished thought belongs not to one or to the other, but to both. The notion, the thought, or the work that is unfinished opens a space for community. Nancy says: "Il ne s'agit pas de faire, ni de produire, ni d'installer une communauté. . . il s'agit d'inachever son partage" (Communauté 87). Part of the reason for literary writing, it seems to me, is a search for a kind of joyous sharing that may occur in the experience of writing and reading. Nancy states this as a kind of axiom: "L'écrivain le plus solitaire n'écrit que pour l'autre" (Communauté 165). The joy of resonating to something in another's work is gratifying and invites reciprocation, discussion, and elaboration as well as question and debate.

The literary culture embraces alterity in a space that remains unfixed and unfinished because community of this sort is never complete. Nancy insists on community that is *désœuvrée* as the normative condition of being together, but respecting difference. "La communauté est ce qui a lieu toujours par autrui et pour autrui. Ce n'est pas l'espace des 'moi'. . . mais celui des *je*, qui sont

toujours des *autrui* (ou bien, ne sont rien)" (Nancy, Communauté 42).

In their analyses of literature in the last thirty years, the various theorists considered in this study have challenged the solidity of structures. They acknowledge the importance of instability and undecidability in theoretical discussions. Part of the ingenuity of strategies of complication is a refusal to be appropriated by partisan interests and a resolve to maintain an autonomy that allows for an on-going oppositional stance. Derrida writes:

Destabilization is required for 'progress' as well. And the 'de' of deconstruction signifies not the demolition of what is constructing itself, but rather what remains to be thought beyond the constructivist or destructionist scheme. (Limited 147)

In the process of this study, I have sought to take an idea that originated in sociology, the condition of liminality, connect it philosophically to aporia and undecidability, and then give it a practical application in three literary texts. In widening the perspective to literary theory, I have briefly discussed deconstruction and *écriture féminine*. (It is important to state again that this has been an exercise in border sites and boundary crossings and not an in-depth study in any of these disciplines - sociology, philosophy, literary theory.) I

quote writers and theorists who have transgressed the precepts of the literary establishment and have found new meanings and become new voices in the process. Liminality functions in literary communities to link and to disrupt. The role of deconstruction has been, and still is, one of disruption and of destabilization, but the function of this seemingly negative movement is potentially positive: "Mais cette instabilité peut encore nous porter ailleurs, et en vérité aux limites dont procède l'instabilité même, à l'origine même du mouvement déstabilisant" (Derrida, "Apories" 332).

Through the openings afforded in instability, women have an occasion to affirm differences and to speak about a variety of interests including the long-neglected dimensions of knowledge of and from the human body. One of the most significant movements of the twentieth century, in my opinion, has been what is often called the emancipation of women. It seems to me that this had to occur, or at least begin to occur, before women who took pen or *qalam* in hand to write could be celebrated, or even truly accepted, in the literary world. However, in the recent past virulent religious fundamentalisms around the world have begun to undo the changes that have afforded women a voice and a pen. This frightening turn of events is spearheaded



by various versions of an uncompromising patriarchy which feels ordained by God to return the future to the past. As a form of resistance, one can promote a liminality of literature that functions to give women a place from which to speak and write. It can provide the literary community with opportunities for dialog, dispute, and occasionally some measure of *communitas*.

Literary theory has in the last thirty years transgressed enough boundaries to alter that which is read and taught in the study of "literature" on the university level. This alteration can be visualized by thinking about the content of a course offered in "Twentieth-Century Literature" at one of the major American universities as it is presently taught with that which would have been included in such a course thirty or so years ago. The publication dates on the novels under study here cover a similar span of time, and L'Amour, la fantasia, published in 1985, reveals a self-awareness that is not found in the other two. Djebbar's narrator has a consciousness, which is written into the text, of her position in-between two worlds and of her unveiled body as an expression of that liminal position.

The provocative work of some present-day literary theorists has been transgressive to the point of prompting

a sense of liminality in the study of literature. This anti-structural moment remains open and available to innovative literary works, and it is not yet clear what will follow.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Chapters one and five serve as a frame to this study of the functions of liminality in literature by introducing the concept of liminality in the first chapter and in chapter five relating it to the work of literary theory at the present time. Chapters two through four explicate liminality by referencing characteristics and examples of liminality in three novels using the schema of the author's authority, the narratorial voices, and the feminine presence. To conclude this study, I will summarize the discussion of the functions of liminality in the novels and attempt to relate those to the larger context discussed in chapter five.

The authority of Bataille, Green, and Djébar is in question because they, each in a particular manner, transgress some criteria for literary acceptance. I state that these writers are not included with writers commonly accepted as canonical, and, at the same time, I counter that argument by explaining the manner in which each of them has become authoritative. Assuming that the customary trajectory in literary practice is for a writer to begin as liminal and become authoritative, then it can be argued that Bataille, Green, and Djébar are all on the threshold of being authoritative. One of the early challengers of

twentieth-century literary conventions was Bataille. His transgressive fiction and provocative philosophical style may still seem shocking, but Bataille has today become a model and a resource for those who wish to challenge authority. In this respect Bataille is now authoritative. Julien Green challenges authority also. He projects a certain indifference to it evident in his resignation from the *Académie française*. This transgressive action, by being the first of its kind, has established a precedent, which is a kind of authority in itself. His writing transgresses unstated prohibitions for modern fiction since it includes accounts of religious experience and, in the case of L'Autre, instances of Christian conversion. Green, therefore, is outside the bounds on the opposite side to Bataille. However, Green is a mystic and a sensualist and in this duality shares a border space with Bataille. Djébar's challenge to authority occurs merely by the act of her writing. As a woman in her culture, she transgresses the patriarchal tenets by not taking the veil and then, more boldly, by an unveiling through her autobiographical fiction. Djébar is now becoming widely appreciated by readers of both the Eastern and Western traditions, and she establishes a type of authority by her liminal position between the two. In addition, she is authoritative by

virtue of her lived experience and her thorough research. If the idea of the liminality of literature can be understood as resulting from the impact that literary criticism, due to the twin influences of deconstruction and feminism, has had on literature during the latter half of this century, then Bataille could be described as a model of deconstruction (his work is considered seminal to it), Green as a persistent model of "otherness" (he is American in France and French to Americans), and Djébar as a model practitioner of *écriture féminine*.

The narratorial voices heard in chapters two, three, and four are voices in search of meaning. Troppmann searches in the vicinity of death as he, like Orpheus, looks into death in pursuit of his erotic desire. In L'Érotisme Bataille speculates that the relationship between the mystical and the sensual hinges on an agonizing darkness - "cette obscurité angoissante" (247) - that belongs to both. Meaning either evades Troppmann or presents possibilities too hideous to contemplate.

In L'Autre Roger and Karin are always out of sync with one another in their search for meaning. They look first to sex for the satisfaction of their quest, but pleasure is short-lived. During the course of their *récits* each of them has a turn in venting their disbelief in God and then

suspending it in favor of an affirmation of faith. In both his voice and his letters, in his agnosticism and then in his religious commitment, Roger appears authoritative and certain even though his behaviors do not bear this out. Karin's voice, on the other hand, is the undecided one that acknowledges liminality.

Djebar's narrator searches for meaning in the suffering she and other women have endured, and this becomes the basis for a bonding or *communitas*. Voices in L'Amour, la fantasia are subjects speaking from a position as objects - disparate voices that formerly have not been heard. The narrator of L'Amour, la fantasia finishes her story in a liminal drift as she remains ambivalent about her own upbringing and the role that the French language has had in it, and she remains anxious about the future of her country.

The feminine presence has been felt in unprecedented ways in literature during the last half of this century as women have become active on their own behalf. In the progression in this study from one text to the next, the feminine presence can be seen to change in a manner somewhat parallel to cultural changes in regard to women during the last fifty years. In Le Bleu du ciel the women are cast in stereotypical roles: Edith is the wife and

mother; Dorothea, the lover; Xénie, the rich single girl. Only Lazare is entirely non-traditional in her role as intellectual and political activist, and Troppmann describes her as dirty. She disturbs the categories Troppmann has for women, and he disparages her. Dirt is essentially matter out of place (Douglas 2), and Lazare, with her Communist/Christian ideology and her plans to blow up a prison in an insurrection, is out of place as a woman in the milieu of France in the 1930s. Karin in L'Autre is labeled a "prostitute" in the minds of her neighbors and is treated accordingly, shunned by the respectable and pursued by con artists and thugs. The kind of violence that brings about Karin's death is a reality that is often condoned by a society that requires conformity, and hers is one that allows little latitude for deviation. Karin takes initiative with men, is independent in her thinking, and in the course of the *récit* writes a novel. However, her choices prove fatal - her independence leaves her unprotected, and she meets a harsh death.

In L'Amour, la fantasia the entire novel becomes a space for feminine presence. Djébar's narrator allows women to be and to speak anywhere and everywhere within the text, and that is in stark contrast to the limited options women have within the Algerian culture. However, women

often die in a brutal and a bloody fashion. Not only were they victims of the French invasion and occupation beginning in the nineteenth century and victims of the battle for independence one hundred and thirty years later, women continue to be killed by a contemporary version of a harsh, unyielding Algerian patriarchy.

One can read into the deaths of women in these texts the possibility evoked by some feminists that after finally attaining the position of the speaking subject, women will be pushed over the edge into the depths of oblivion (or be otherwise annihilated) by current philosophical trends that would dismiss the "subject" in an effort motivated, it would seem, not by an overt patriarchal concern to maintain ideology, but by a persistent intention to move beyond ideologies. A legitimate fear is that the outcome for women will be the same as before and that feminism will become just another "ism" whose day is past. Jardine speaks to this concern: "Some have suggested that 'feminism' is nothing more than a historical moment itself - having risen, flourished, and died within a historical trajectory beyond which the West is moving rapidly (Jardine Gynesis 82). It is my perception that philosophical exploration has already surpassed a border that separates



two eras and that *écriture féminine* makes evident feminism's having survived that border crossing.<sup>8</sup>

It is pertinent that in each of these novels, women write. They write across thresholds of space or at threshold times: Edith in Le Bleu du ciel writes letters from across the English Channel; Karin in L'Autre writes the end of her novel just before her death; Djébar's narrator writes the voices of suffering women just before they are silenced by the coming of the Fantasia; she is historian, biographer, critic, fiction writer, and practitioner of *écriture féminine*. Like Edith and Karin, she writes women's thoughts, anxieties, and premonitions, but she also writes the woman's body, blood, screams, tears, silence, and mutilation.

The community of figures populating this study are non-conformists and highly diverse: Troppmann, Dirty, Xénie, Lazare, Roger, Karin, Mlle. Ott, Ib, Marie, a little Algerian girl going to a French school, Chérifa, Lla Zohra, Pauline Rolland, Fromentin. It is perhaps useful to note that they are brought together only through the writing and

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<sup>8</sup>For some perspectives on the future directions of feminism, see Alice Jardine, Gynesis (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985); Susan Rubin Suleiman, Subversive Intent (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1990; and Diane Elam, Feminism and Deconstruction (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

the reading of this study, and I would like this to be suggestive of the manner in which writing brings different people and different texts together into a literary community that is always unfinished and transitory. Most of the figures in these three novels are still liminal at the end of the *récit*. Oscillating between possibilities, they remain undecided. They do not quickly foreclose on options, and in the end some are passengers on their way elsewhere. A sense of permanency appears to be beyond their grasp.

Finally, let me add an observation regarding the project of writing on the "community" assembled within this study. The inclusion of Bataille's Le Bleu du ciel, Julien Green's L'Autre, and Assia Djebar's L'Amour, la fantasia within the same dissertation has become a kind of liminality in praxis. The three novels are selections from the margins of the accepted canon of French literature, and each functions to bring to this study an illustration of liminality. However, the juxtaposition and comparison of these texts within a single study can effect a sense of discontinuity or disorientation, and I anticipate that my readers will have found themselves situated beyond their own comfort thresholds by at least one of the novels under study and, thereby, feel liminal to this project at some

point or points during the reading. In like manner, Derrida and Turner are not readily linked in current theoretical space and putting them together seems to transgress, to some extent, the projects of both. Nevertheless, considering their mutual interest in border spaces, each can be seen to bring something to the other: Derrida's discussion of aporias adds what I consider a necessary provocative dimension to the process of change found in Turner; and Turner's theory of "liminality" makes available a quality that he called "*communitas*" that, along with the reflections of Nancy and Blanchot on community, suggests a relational dimension of aporia not elaborated by Derrida.

In the process of this writing, it has become apparent to me that the medium and the message of this study are somewhat oppositional since the style of writing works as a counter-illustration to the subject under consideration: a dissertation requires a linear style of thinking and writing, a style that liminality challenges; or to put it in the reverse order, liminality allows a measure of inconsistency and circularity that a dissertation discourages. As soon as it is described and analyzed in a logical, coherent manner, the qualities that made liminality liminal seem to dissipate. Analyzing it brings the experience into the domain of logic, and liminality

exists in the "betwixt and between" of logical states. Jardine suggests, however, that there is "a logic of the in-between," and she confesses to have stolen this strategy from "Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva" ("Opaque" 104). The in-between provides a position for successfully maintaining influence from an oppositional stance. It seems to me that the logic of the in-between has, during the course of the twentieth century, been made available by people like van Gennep, Turner, Derrida, Cixous, and Irigaray as well as Bataille, Green, and Djébar. Because of their work, this kind of logic has begun to make some sense in the wider intellectual community.

The impact that these (and others writing from the "in-between") have had on the study of literature is not problematic in the negative sense. Literary theory by preserving its liminal status is in a position to work against the appropriation of literary space for any one totalitarian voice, examples of which are found in the three texts studied here: Troppmann's hallucinations foretell an annihilation that is instigated by a totalizing politics; Karin's ostracism is the result of her refusal to submit to a totalizing morality; and Djébar's narrator

describes the events in Algeria as an on-going series of totalizing patriarchies.

Liminality, therefore, functions to give literature and literary studies the enviable position of an influence that exceeds the boundaries of a particular discipline to challenge the entire academic community and, from the threshold of the academy, speaks out to a larger audience within the culture.

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## VITA

Malynda Strother Taylor graduated from Ouachita Baptist University with a bachelor of arts degree in 1963. She has done graduate study at the University of Oklahoma, Texas Christian University, University of Tennessee, and Middlebury College. She finished a master of education degree at Northwestern State University in Natchitoches, Louisiana, in 1988 and began doctoral studies at Louisiana State University in 1989. She has spent some of her summers in France, and has participated in summer programs in La Rochelle and in Tours. She has taught French in high schools in Texas, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. She is now an associate professor of French at Louisiana College in Pineville, Louisiana, where she has taught full time for the past eleven years. The degree of Doctor of Philosophy will be conferred at the December commencement, 1998.

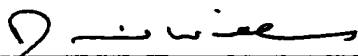
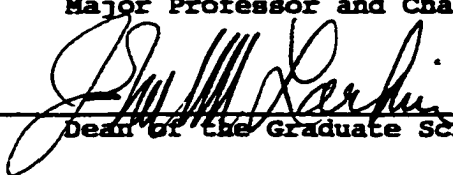
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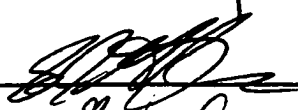
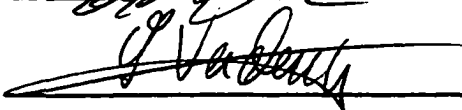
**Major Field:** French

**Title of Dissertation:** Functions of Liminality in Literature: A Study of Georges Bataille's Le Bleu du Ciel, Julien Green's L'Autre, and Assia Djebar's L'Amour, la fantasia

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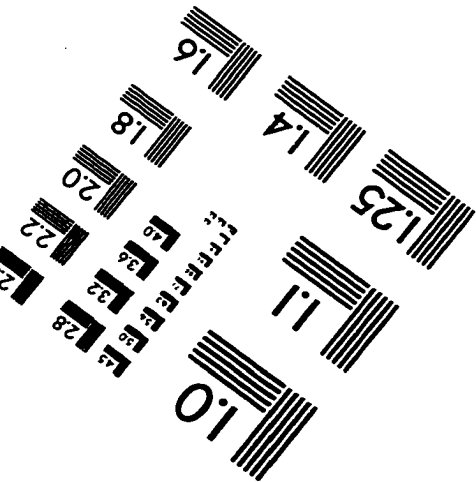
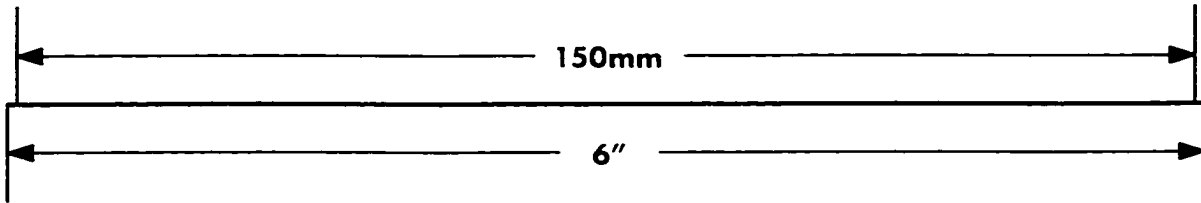
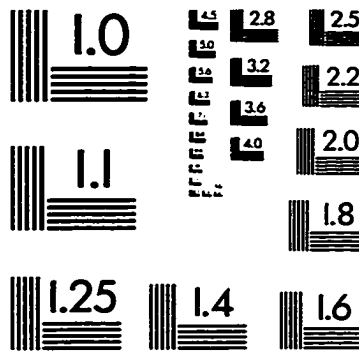
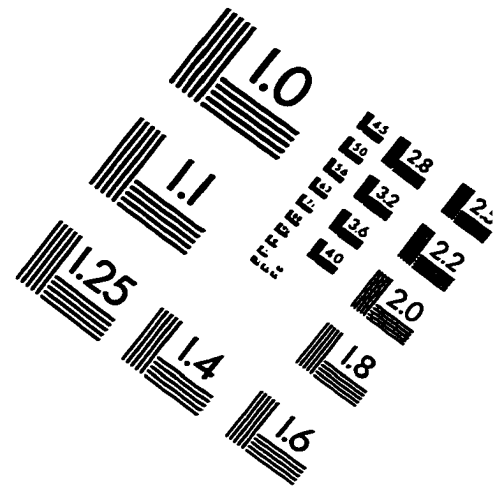
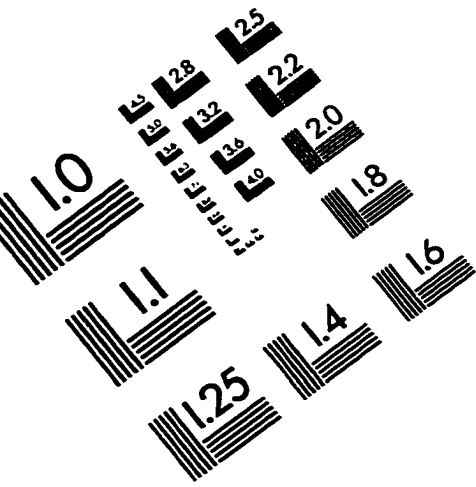
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